YOU'RE ONLY YOUNG ONCE

MARGARET WIDDEMER

To wish B.N.F.

Very many happy

returns

Jack.

June 28, 1919

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BY

MARGARET WIDDEMER

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FOR AUNTIE

WITH LOVE, AND THANKS FOR INSISTING
THAT I *COULD* WRITE PROSE IF I TRIED

YOU'RE ONLY YOUNG ONCE

CHAPTER ONE

You might have thought, if you didn't know, that there was an afternoon tea-party going on, but it wasn't: it was merely all the Goldsborough girls in one room. There were five of them, ranging all the way from Angela, who was twenty-three and looked so much like a doll that by the law of contraries you could be almost sure she had a great deal of common sense, to Isabella, who was fifteen and had large eyes and brown curls and dimples and had to be kept down. In between came Deborah, who was tall and lissom and cream-and-gold, Janetta, who was straight and dark and Indian-handsome, and Annice, small and dark and quiet and so much like a Sir Walter Scott engraving, at sixteen, that her sisters made her life a burden about it. There were three boys besides,

elsewhere about the place, a father, a mother, a devoted stationary maid and a younger movable one whose personality changed frequently. There was a good deal of live-stock as well, for John, the eldest son, had a passion for family pets which was quite undisturbed by the fact that he was only at home to enjoy them Saturdays and Sundays.

It was a big old rambling house, as shabby as it could well be, and much older than anyone could have imagined. It had been where it was since before the Revolution, and there had always been Goldsboroughs living in it; Goldsboroughs of much birth and wealth, at first. They still had the birth, and, as John was wont to say, quoting Sir Lucius O'Trigger, "their honor and the family pictures were as fresh as ever"; but a good deal of the money had faded away. It worried the large Goldsborough family of the present generation very little indeed.

They lived on in the little sleepy, courteous southern Pennsylvania town, and were much respected. That the charming father of the family was temperamental and could do everything but

make money, was considered for them, rather than against them. They were descended from the younger branch of the Carolina Goldsboroughs, their ancestors had been Signers and Patroons (that was a New York strain) and Knights of the Golden Horseshoe (that was a Virginia ancestress) and there was even one Mayflower voyager, back of Great-grandmother Everingham of Boston, who had contributed to the family traditions a set of Apostle spoons and the Everingham self-will.

All three of the boys, and the two elder girls, Angela and Janetta, earned their living adequately: brains and ability were a Goldsborough heritage. After hours they donned beautiful and correct garments (made by themselves) and enjoyed themselves at the town's best parties. Bentonburg kept up the tradition it had of being a very gay town in the days when it had been General Wayne's headquarters.

It was not often all the girls of the Goldsborough family were together, except on Saturdays and Sundays, for Angela's music-pupils and Janetta's position in the town real-estate office took them

away a good deal of the time, and Isabella went to school. But there had been a grand wedding this afternoon and all the girls had gone. Angela, who looked so much like a small angelic doll that she was in great request as bridesmaid, had been maid of honor this time, and was considered by her sisters to have "quite drowned out the bride."

They were sitting and lounging about the long, shabby parlor, with its out-at-elbows furniture that collectors begged for, and its family pictures that needed repaired frames badly. And they were discussing love.

"But how," demanded Janetta severely, embracing her knees and sitting up on the rep couch, "are you going to know it's the right man when you see him?"

"Try 'em all," replied Isabella flippantly. "You've done pretty well so far, Jan!"

There was a shout of laughter, and Janetta, in whom the ancestral touch of Pocahontas had come out vividly, threw back her black head and looked witheringly at Isabella as long as she could before she too gave up and began to laugh.

"I don't think so at all," said Angela meditatively. ("I ought to go and take off this grand garment. Somebody send me, won't they?) I think the way is to marry at seventeen, before you're old enough to think about it at all."

"You can't," said wide-eyed Annice, the literal, sitting up against the chair-back that had once been hallowed by Alexander Hamilton's powdered head, and matching it excellently. "That would make all of you old maids but Isabella and me!"

"It wouldn't at all!" defended Isabella, who worshiped Janetta and took all her conquests as a personal joy. "Even Angela isn't old, and Deb is only nineteen!"

"There isn't any way at all of knowing the right man," Angela laid down the law firmly, sitting up like a pink Christmas angel in her chiffons, and speaking in the character of all-wise eldest sister. She also desired to avert a squabble. "Not one solitary way. It's pure, blind luck, *I* think. When you get in love with anybody, how do you know whether it's pink thrills and wavy lights, or the lasting, like-him-at-breakfast, want-to-mend-his-

flannels, real kind? You don't, *because* you're in love. You just have to shut your eyes and snatch."

As Angela was the most deliberate and cautious of persons, her sisters all laughed again. But Deborah, from the window-seat, where she was stretched, nibbling one of the pink cakes that had been sent home to Isabella, sobered instantly and looked wistful.

"Please don't talk that way, Angel!" she begged, fixing her long golden-brown eyes on her elder sister. "There—there *must* be really-truly love at first sight that lasts!"

Angela shook her yellow head.

Deborah twisted her lithe body around and sat up.

"I *know* there is!" she insisted.

Her sisters, most naturally, pounced on her in unison.

"Oh, tell us!" cried Janetta, thrilled to the extent of coming over and standing above Deborah.

"Deborah!" Angela inquired, "do you mean to say——"

"Oh, Debby," shrilled Isabella, voicing the sentiments of the assembly, "*is* it James?"

Deborah, her creamy skin flushing pink, beat off her assailants.

"It *isn't* James. I don't see why you all think, just because a man hounds a girl, it has to be him. It isn't anybody. It's only that I'm sure—I just *feel*—that when the right man comes along you *know*."

The others continued to ask her questions till they had to disperse; Angela, with a belated sense of duty, to take off the maid-of-honor gown, Isabella and Annice to help old black Grace with the supper, and Janetta to change into a middy and get in a game of tennis with John, who was her twin brother and special partner. Deborah stayed behind, she said to tidy the long old parlor. With so many girls there were always men around, and you had to prepare for contingencies. There was, fortunately, a side-porch and a front porch, and the long old parlor could be cut in two with folding doors. The family sitting-room was upstairs, and the dining-room was used as a morning-room, for sewing and such things.

She moved slowly about, settling cushions and

pulling down couch covers and putting chairs back. But as she moved she continued the train of thought that Janetta had awakened in her mind.

"There's no reason why I shouldn't be romantic if I want to," she told herself defensively. "And I'm just as certain as I can be that I will know. Because—there's the red brick dream!"

She batted a pillow hard, but she held on to her belief.

This is what it was:

Ever since Deborah could remember, she had had a pet day-dream about a pet house that she was going to live in some day, when she really started in to live. Suburban residences and steam-heated apartments and even rambling, shabby old houses packed with relatives, were all very well for the preface of life; but some time—some time, Deborah had always been certain, she would find the house of her dreams and go to live there—with Him. For that would be the way Deborah would know that He—whoever He was—*was* Him. He would have her Red Brick Dream, too. It was to be a

long way off, that Red Brick Dream of hers—of theirs. . . .

Deborah gave up any pretense of tidying, and curled down in the nearest chair and stared at the remaining pink cake. She did not really see it. She locked her hands behind her honey-colored head, and relaxed all down the young length of her as she traveled the Dream's paths for the thousandth time. . . . It was set far back from any roads there might be. There was a thick wood before you came to it at all. Then came unexpected formal terraces—and peacocks, surely! Then the house. It was Colonial, and dull mellow old red brick. It was big and rambled. It was not very light inside—Deborah was only nineteen and she still liked hidy, shadowy, hide-and-seeky places where you could curl up on window-seats. It had enormous bare-floored rooms, with quaint, stiff furniture set about the walls. There were pictures, mostly paintings of ancestors. Whose ancestors Deborah had no idea, and she didn't much care. They were just Ancestors. No well-conducted family was without Ancestors.

There was also a music-room with an old gilt harp in one window—Deborah had a sort of an idea that she might learn how to play it—and a piano, with His violin lying on it. And there would be a hedged garden.

Deborah forgot all about the uncertainty of this world, and the wise things her sisters had said. She was sure—*sure*—that when He came He would have the Dream, too. Why—it might be any of the boys she knew! . . . Well—not James Harrison. James was that trying, but inevitable thing, the man people think you'll marry in the long run. He was large and amiable and dense, and very, very good. And he had light eyebrows. But almost any of the other boys . . . Deborah knew a great many boys, naturally. The back parlor was hers, and usually in use. And any thrilling day some one of the boys might say, out of a clear sky:

"Do you know, I've always had a dream of living in a red brick house with a woods in front of it, and . . ."

And then Deborah would *know*.

But, on second thoughts, would they be likely to

do it out of a clear sky? Surely it wouldn't be unmaidenly to—to just inquire a little.

Deborah got up and began to tidy desperately again. First, though, she took a vicious bite out of the pink cake.

"You don't know everything, you old thing," she said—softening, however, as she ate it, for it was a *very* good cake. "Just wait till to-morrow night."

And having straightened everything out, she walked over to the telephone. She was going to begin her experiment.

She began Tuesday evening, because the elder girls were out of the house that night, and she knew the boys might ask questions if they saw Dan Halliday walking in. Dan was not a person who particularly interested Deborah, and Sandy might remember how she had announced that she never wanted to set eyes on him again. To-night was Sandy's frat night, thank goodness! But Deborah was really beginning on Dan Halliday because he didn't especially interest her, and she wanted him out of the way first.

Dan came over early, much pleased at being asked. Usually he had to ask Deborah—hard. She put him in the most comfortable chair there was—(with a light full on him), begged him to smoke, and began breathlessly to lead up.

"Do you ever wonder what kind of a house you'd choose to live in, Dan, if you could have just what you wanted?" she inquired, a little tremulously.

Dan looked puzzled. He hadn't much imagination. But Deborah had been uncommonly nice to him, and he did the gallant best he could. He was a slim, dark, romantic-looking person with a devotion to baseball-scores, and it came a little hard to answer wild questions like this. It is always hard to look romantic when you aren't. So much is expected of you.

"Why—why——" he stammered, "I—why—a millionaire's house, of course! Butlers and——"

"Butlers' pantries full of cocktails, I suppose!" drawled the scornful but just-the-same relieved Deborah. No need to worry about it's being Dan!

"Now, that's not fair!" said Dan, grinning,

however, for it struck him as a wonderful piece of humor on Deborah's part.

Deborah dimpled and settled back and let Dan talk complacently on. Her swift mind was darting ahead to the dance next night. She could polish off—yes, that was the irreverent way Deborah put it—she could polish off Billy Martiny at the dance, and Horace Polk. Horace was going to take her.

But after Dan had gone Deborah shivered.

"It's—it's awfully risky work!" she confided to the heaped ash tray, the only remaining sign that sad-eyed Dan and his misplaced dream of a profusion of butlers, had come and gone. "Supposing —only supposing—well, he couldn't. Nobody could have my Red Brick Dream but the right man. I'll know!"

So she dismissed anxiety and began cheerfully planning what she'd wear in her hair next night to go with her corn-colored taffeta. She decided on a red silk poppy from Janetta's hat, dumped the ashes of Dan, theoretically and literally, into the wastebasket, and went upstairs to bed.

"There's something the matter with you," said

her brother Worrell critically, as he eyed her, before he left to take Florrie Hood to the Country Club dance.

"There isn't," said Deborah. "I'm only worried for fear Horace Polk will be late."

Worrell lifted his eyebrows.

"If so, it will be the first time in the history of Bentonburg," he said. "You can set your watch by the estimable Horace."

Of course, your brothers always are snippy about the men who take you places; still, Deborah, outwardly graceful and unmoved, shivered a little in her soul. Horace *was*—so estimable. And suppose it should be Horace? She decided to make no move till well along in the evening, and not even then unless she wanted to.

Dance music always keyed her up so high she could do anything. So she waited until the orchestra had begun and she was sitting out in a shadowy corner of the Country Club with Billy Martiny, before she approached the question. Billy Martiny wasn't bad. He was only a wee bit ladylike, and too fond of quoting Omar. Deborah con-

sidered that Omar's proper place was in a graduation essay, and nowhere else. It made you so embarrassed to be suddenly addressed as "O my beloved," till you discovered that it was only poetry, and even then people around might not always understand. So she talked about other things for quite a while before she began to pull the conversation along its appointed path.

Billy was leaning back, looking at one little white star that twinkled far up. The moonlight glittered on his fair hair and his long eyelashes, and he looked nearly too handsome for any good use.

"I should like to call that always *our* star!" he said softly.

"It looks like a very *nice* star," said Deborah, politely, but much engrossed in her subject. "Billy, did you ever think what kind of a house you'd like to live in if——"

But it is a risky plan to leave sentences in mid-air when you are addressing susceptible young gentlemen who have just been considering mutually-owned stars. Billy began to talk with haste and earnestness, and Deborah to answer the same way

for about five minutes: and the end of it was a very pink and stately Deborah saying wrathfully: "And you think I've been *encouraging* you!" and stalking haughtily across the veranda, Billy trailing tragically behind.

She went about the next man more tactfully. You see, there are three kinds of men in the world, as every woman knows: the kind you couldn't possibly marry, the kind you wouldn't care much whether you married or not, and the kind it would be a positive pleasure to be married to. Now, Dan and Billy belonged, in Deborah's young mind, to the first class—the couldn't possiblies. The rest of the men she had met—well, they were in the second class, rather. But—who wants a man you can stand and no more when you're only nineteen? There are such heaps of things to do besides keeping in touch with the hero of your dreams! Still, Deborah thought—well, she thought it would be interesting to know.

But she let two dances go by without any more inquiries. And it was really quite without intention that she found herself letting Horace Polk de-

scribe to her a roomy suburban villa a friend of his had built, and which he seemed to consider the last word in happy homes. Horace was awfully nice. She had always liked him, as long as she could remember. But as she swung smoothly around in his arms it struck her forcibly that a roomy frame suburban villa was exactly what Fate had designed Horace Polk to live in. She could see him mowing lawns and commuting and wheeling baby-carriages—"And oh," said she to herself, "anybody that lived in a red brick Colonial house behind a terrace and a woods *couldn't* do that——"

"And a splendid hot-water supply," said Horace's enthusiastic voice in her ear. "I tell you, a fellow's in luck to be able to build a house like that!"

"Yes," said Deborah hastily. "Yes, indeed, Horace, he certainly is—hot water is the most useful thing I know—*who's* that man talking to James Harrison, over there?"

Horace followed the direction of Deborah's eyes, and answered, rather reluctantly, for James Harrison, as has been said, was the man people thought

she would marry in the long run—if he kept on running hard enough. He was the one her sisters most annoyed her about. He was what the local branch of Colonial Dames usually described sweetly as "one of the newer element"; but he was, nevertheless, much sought after. He was very good and solid and well-to-do, and everything else that your mother most admires.

"I don't know," said Horace. "I think he came with Harrison. Southerner, I think." He whirled her on.

But every time the dance took them past the corner where James Harrison stood talking to the stranger Deborah's eyes caught and held. Not on James. James looked as clean and nice and domestic as always, but—well—James didn't stand for anything so *very* interesting. And the other man—did. What was it Angela had said mockingly about pink lights and wavy thrills? Of course, Deborah reminded herself hastily, of course, they didn't really count in the long run. But—well—they were *wonderful* things, and the man with James Harrison simply radiated them. Crossing near him was an

excitement—looking at him was an adventure. He had light brown hair, and brown eyes, and a brown skin, and a look as if he'd understand every single thing you said to him without asking you to explain. Even the fantastic ones. And her next dance would be with James! She would be close to the man. Maybe she would be introduced to him. She would speak to him and touch his hand——

"Your eyes are like stars," said Horace. "You certainly look *ripping* to-night, Deborah!"

"Are they?" said she absently, halting close to James as the dance ended. James looked as nearly pleased thereat as he could, for his face wasn't the kind that expressed things very well. The brown young man looked at Deborah, and made an impulsive step forward, as if—it was foolish—as if he had always known her, and had been away from her a long, long time, and was *dreadfully* glad to get back. And Deborah—well, she felt just that way about him.

CHAPTER TWO

But James Harrison introduced them just as calmly as if the ballroom wasn't full of pink lights and rose-colored thrills, and the orchestra hadn't begun to play angel-choir music, and as if being carried away to dance with James wasn't the most fearful thing that had ever happened to her.

"What did you say his name was?" she asked as James revolved her down the room in his usual Teddy-bear-on-wheels fashion.

"Legare, Gray Legare," said James. "He's staying with me. He's a Carolinian. A very good chap."

A good chap! The heartbreaking inadequacies of James swept over her in a heavier flood than they ever had before. A—good—chap——! With those eyes, and that way of speaking, and that way of standing, and that way of looking at you. . . .

"Yes," said Deborah aloud, "he seems very nice. You—you might bring him over to-morrow night."

"That's kind of you," said James. He obviously took it as a special grace to himself. "I will."

Too late the dreadful thought dashed into Deborah's honey-colored head that James would try to give the stranger an Impression. She had spent the last six months trying to make him stop it, and stopping the impressions after they were given. But—oh, well, it's difficult to be annoyed with anyone when your next dance is going to be with somebody who is—everything Gray Legare was.

Pink thrills—but they weren't pink. They were wonderful and silvery and perfect. So was living. So was everything. . . . He danced with just her step, and perfectly. It seemed merely natural that everything he did should fit into everything she did.

"Oh, I'm just *drenched* with happiness!" thought Deborah to herself. And just then Gray Legare made his first remark.

"If happiness were water," he said whimsically, "I'd be drenched through by now."

"Why!" said Deborah, "you feel——" she was going to finish, "you feel that way, too?" but she

didn't. "You—you might get me wet," she said foolishly, in a meek little voice that had a hint of laughter in it.

"I certainly hope so," said Gray Legare. There was a quiver of gayety and excitement in his voice, too. Deborah liked the pretty Southern twist he gave to "certainly." "When am I going to see you again?" he went on. "We might as well get that straight now."

"Why, Mr. Harrison is going to bring you over to-morrow night, if you'll come," said Deborah.

"Oh, yes," said Gray, "but that doesn't count. I mean really see you, by ourselves. You know, we've got a lot to talk about."

("Yes," thought Deborah, "but how did you know we had?")

"Have we?" she asked aloud, smiling at him a bit defiantly. "What makes you think so, when you've known me just a little, little while?"

"A little while?" echoed Gray in a rather bewildered way. Then he cheered up. "That's true, but—but somehow I really feel as if we'd known

each other for years. Let's play we have. Honestly, don't you feel so—just a little?"

"Just a little," said Deborah, as denyingly as she could with a heart that was acting like a kitten chasing its tail.

"Then I can come the night after, too?" said Legare, returning to the charge.

"Why—I think so," said Deborah. "I don't think I have anything that night——"

And then the music stopped and Deborah's next partner pounced on her and danced her off.

The rest of the evening was a waste and a desert, varied by one or two wonderful, very short, dances with Gray Legare. They didn't say much to each other, some way, though there was so much to be said. It seemed unnecessary to talk. And it never struck Deborah till afterwards that she had not asked him anything about red brick houses. But, of course—why, of course he would have her dream, too, just as he had everything else. Plenty of time to find out about that!

The thrills went home with her. All the way back with Horace things Gray Legare had said and

looked and been kept playing over and over again in her mind like a beautiful piece of music.

She roomed with Janetta. Janetta was a very comfortable roommate, because she was orderly, if a bit severe when you weren't; but to-night Janetta rebuked her severely.

"*Please* don't toss so, Debby!" she implored. "Remember I have to be at work at nine to-morrow—I can't take my time as you can over the sewing!"

Deborah meekly endeavored to lie still. But the beautiful thoughts kept thrilling through her mind, and making her so restless that finally she got up altogether, and read poetry the rest of the night. All next day the thoughts about him went around the house with her. She felt wrapped up tight in them as if they were a big, beautiful, fairy-present cloak.

When it came time in the evening for Gray Legare and—oh, yes,—James Harrison to come, Deborah stood very still and held on to her heart so it wouldn't beat too hard. You don't want your heart to show right through to—to people you've only

seen once. And Deborah braced herself hard when the bell rang. And then—in came James Harrison all alone!

Deborah's heart gave a horrid little cold drop, and she forgot her manners entirely.

"Where's Mr. Legare?" she demanded of James on the spot.

"Coming along later," responded James placidly. "One of the fellows held him up on business when we were just starting. He'll be along—seemed in enough of a hurry to get away!"

And James settled himself in the most comfortable chair with a monarch-of-all-he-surveyed sort of air, and began to talk. He did it in just the same old way he always did, and Deborah knew sufficiently well what was scheduled to come to be able to answer politely at the proper intervals. She spent the time in between in thinking about Gray Legare's voice, and his eyelashes and his arm when it tightened around her, reversing, and what he would look like in business clothes . . . and James, a little crossly, repeated something she hadn't replied to. Surely, in a beautiful, loving,

adorable world like this one, you shouldn't even be absent-minded with good old faithful-hound Jameses.

"I beg your pardon," she said, smiling at him softly. "Please. I'm sorry, James. Won't you say it over again?"

James said it over again.

"Did you ever think what sort of a house you'd like to live in after—well, after awhile, Deborah?"

This from James! Deborah stared at him. This sort of thing must be in the air. Maybe her thinking so hard about houses the night before had thought-waved it to him, though Deborah had always considered James a person whom thought-waves could dash up against for years without leaving a mark.

"Why, yes," she said. (When *was* he coming?) "Have you?"

James sat forward and began to gesture with his cigarette.

"M'hm, I have lately," he said. "Never did much, before. I have a house in my mind's eye now, Deborah, that I want to tell you about."

Deborah saw it, with as much of *her* mind's eye as she could remove from Gray Legare. A big, one-of-a-row city house, all interior-decorated and improved and groomed exactly like all its relations up and down the block.

"Yes," she said politely. (Wouldn't he ever, ever come, with his brown eyes and his quick, gentle ways, and his belongingness—ever, ever?)

"It would be red brick," said James.

"Red brick?" said Deborah faintly. "Oh, no!"

"Yes," said James complacently. He crossed one large, blue ankle over the other. (Deborah hated blue socks suddenly.) "Red brick, old, mellow, you know. Colonial. Awf'ly Colonial. Pillars and all that. I'd have a wood in front of it, and terraces. And——"

"Oh, *not* peacocks!" burst out Deborah desperately. "Please not!"

"Peacocks, of course," said James cheerfully, looking more competent and stolid and business-like than ever. "And lots of family pictures inside," he went on relentlessly, "and hardwood floors. Don't you like it?" he stopped short to demand,

perhaps struck with the frozen expression on Deborah's face.

"Y-yes . . ." said she.

"Wouldn't *you* like a house like that?" demanded James, pinning her down, it occurred to her, as if she were a Deal.

"Y-yes——" said Deborah. Then she broke out again, protestingly. "It's my house—my house that I've always wanted!"

James rose and beamed.

"Now, do you know," he said, coming appallingly close, "I thought you'd say so! Why, then, Deborah, that settles it. You dear little woman, I——"

And then, by the mercy of Providence, the bell rang, with Gray Legare behind it. She heard one of the boys welcoming him in the hall. Oh, what if he got deflected to Janetta, who had an open night to-night, or carried off, as too often happened, by Worrell or John? But he apparently knew what he was coming for, because he walked in on them immediately. And the lights and the thrills and the happinesses burst out like rockets going up.

So for a little while Deborah and Gray just looked at each other contentedly and let James do all the talking he wanted to. Deborah's impression afterward was that he had been talking about a Shipping Bill.

But in a little while Deborah began to wonder, as much as she could with Gray Legare near her and the thrills all going. Suppose the way she felt about Legare was all pink thrills that couldn't last? Suppose, after all, Everybody was right, and James was the man she ought to marry, the one she'd have the right, like-to-see-him-at-breakfast love for? For James—*James*—had her Red Brick Dream! Still—Deborah made her last throw.

"Mr. Legare," she said, (how absurd to call him that when anybody could see that his right name was Dearest!) "we were talking about the kinds of houses we'd like to live in. What—what kind would you?"

She sat back with her hands holding each other tight while she asked the question.

Gray Legare laughed a little. Anybody less excited than Deborah or less dense than James could

have seen that he didn't much mind what he said, as long as it was Deborah he was speaking to.

"Why—I don't know," he said. "Any house I was used to livin' in, I reckon. House I have down home's all right."

"Oh!" said Deborah forlornly. And then James began to talk shipping again, and Deborah, feeling as if the bottom had dropped out of the world, helped him.

Later, after the two men had gone, Deborah lay awake a long, long time. She kept very stiff and still, not to bother Janetta. What Angela had said about the folly of pink thrills, and James's most unforeseen ownership of her Red Brick Dream, fought in her mind with Gray's eyes and hands and voice and—everything else about him that belonged to everything about her, and always had since the world began, and always would—always! But finally she went to sleep. First she cried a little stealthily, but she remembered that Legare was coming the next night all alone, and you couldn't really cry very hard, even if you ought to belong to another man, with that in prospect!

The next day, of course, was a million times longer than June twenty-second, or whatever the theoretical Longest Day is. But it did wear through at last, and Gray Legare *did* come—early, as a matter of fact; though you couldn't have made either him or Deborah believe it.

They lost very little time in preliminaries. It occurred to Deborah, some years later, that she and Gray never had wasted much time on preliminaries at all. Here was he and here was she—and, why, in Heaven's name, bother with discussions of the weather? So they didn't. Indeed, they said very little of anything for a little while, till Deborah remembered to take her hand away, and Gray Legare remembered to apologize for keeping it.

"I had such a lot to say to you," he said then with an excited little laugh, "and I can't think of a thing!"

"Neither can I," said Deborah, "and—and I had, too!"

"Maybe we'll remember later," suggested Legare cheerfully, and seeming to be in his usual state of perfect contentment with life as long as Deborah

was near. But after a while, during which they had talked fragmentarily about almost everything they both liked—and they both liked very much the same things—Gray Legare sat suddenly forward.

"Look here, Miss Deborah," he asked with abrupt earnestness, "there *isn't* anything special between you and James Harrison?"

Deborah turned deep pink. "No, indeed!" she said. Then she corrected herself conscientiously. "That is—maybe—there ought to be. We—we have the same tastes—one of them——" she blundered miserably.

But Gray Legare was one of those people you simply have to tell things to.

"Tastes in common?" said he. "But—but, Miss Deborah, he simply can't have! He's the best fellow I know. I do know him awfully well. He was down stayin' with me two months this summer, you know. An' he hasn't. Honestly, he hasn't. An' "—Gray Legare said it with a naïve conviction—"I *have!*"

Deborah's eyes filled with tears. It did sound so true!

"But he has," she insisted. "The—the one that counts."

"The one that counts?" repeated Legare. "Won't you tell me what that is, Miss Deborah?"

He leaned forward again earnestly and took one of the nervous ivory hands that were clutching and unclutching on the arms of the chair. His brown, bright eyes looked comfortingly into hers.

"You're just goin' to tell me all about it, an' not worry yourself any more," he said soothingly.

So Deborah did, obediently. You see, you simply had to tell him things when he asked you.

"It—it was my Red Brick Dream," she began bravely.

"It sounds like a rather solid fabric for a dream," said Legare with a smile, though you could see he was a little worried, too.

"Not exactly a dream," explained Deborah. To anybody but him it would have sounded ridiculous, but she knew he'd understand, and he did. "I always had a sort of idea about the kind of house I'd have, just a day-dream about a house, you know —and it was red brick."

Gray Legare relaxed—he even smiled a little.

"Tell me more," he asked.

And Deborah did. Even to the fact that James, who never dreamed even at night, had unexpectedly produced her whole vision before she had said a word to him.

"And you know James never has any imagination or foolishness, or anything like——"

"Like us," finished Gray Legare gravely, but still with the little smile back of what he was saying.

"Yes," nodded Deborah intently. "So when he told me all this, don't you see—and—and—oh, I don't *want* to!"

"Why, then," said Gray Legare still soothingly, and still with the little smile somewhere back, "you don't *have* to. Now you just let *me* talk, Miss Deborah. When did James Harrison start in with this little old duplicate dream of his?"

"Why, just last night for the first time," said Deborah wonderingly.

"An' you say yourself that James hasn't any imagination or foolishnesses."

"No," said Deborah, still at sea.

"An' he pictured this house just exactly the way your brick dream house was?"

"Just exactly, nearly," said Deborah sadly. "There wasn't any old gilt harp, nor any violin on the piano in the music-room, but the woods were in front, and——"

"Well, now, let's look at it reasonably," said Mr. Legare. "James hasn't any imagination. So he must have found that house somewhere—a real house, don't you see?"

"Oh, I wonder!" said Deborah. Maybe that would let her out—you surely needn't marry a man on the strength of his plagiarism from a real live house somebody else owned.

"Do you think that might be really so?" she asked breathlessly. It seemed too lovely an idea to be true.

"I'm very sure it is so," said Legare earnestly. "Now suppose you'd been visiting some fellow—any fellow—and *seen* a house like that——"

Deborah's eyes opened so wide they looked like a fawn's.

"Yes," she said in a breathless whisper.

"And the fellow really *owned* the house——"

"A house," said Deborah passionately, springing up and getting back of the Alexander Hamilton chair, and looking at him over its back with wider eyes than ever. "A red brick house with *pillars*—and *woods*-in-front—and—a *harp*—and a violin lying on the piano under the ancestors?"

"Well, not right now," said Gray Legare, smiling at her, "because the violin generally goes where I go. But——"

He broke off and came over to where she stood poised for flight behind the chair, with the lace on the front of her frock quivering up and down and her cheeks scarlet.

"Don't you believe in love at first sight?" he demanded.

"Yes," said Deborah desperately.

"Isn't this it?" he asked.

Deborah held tighter to the back of the chair and colored more. But—she nodded.

"Then," demanded Gray Legare, "why don't you act as if you did?"

"And so it's only because I've happened to be

left your Red Brick Dream in my father's will," presently said Gray Legare—but his name really *was* Dearest—" that you're going to marry me when I want you to?" But he didn't seem terribly worried.

Deborah put her arms tight up around his neck, and her ivory cheek against his brown one.

" If you lived in a little one room in a horrid old boarding house," she told him, " and asked me to come—and every other man on earth had *cities* of Red Brick Dreams, I'd marry you, and be happy, happy, happy ever after till I died! There!"

And as she kissed him when she said " There," there is no question but that Gray Legare (whose name was really Dearest) believed her.

CHAPTER THREE

"Don't you expect Gray to-night?" demanded Janetta, coming upon Deborah in a dark corner of her own bedroom.

"Yes," admitted Deborah. "He's coming over to-night."

"Then why aren't you sitting down in front of your mirror in a flood of gaslight, doing your hair over for the third time, instead of being coiled up here like Carrie Chapman?"

Carrie Chapman was the family cat, long, yellow and mournful. Deborah, who had a certain lithe felinity in her tall cream-and-gold slimness that was not at all borne out by her childlike and dreamy soul, was naturally annoyed.

"I can't help it if I do remind people of cats and deer and live-stock generally," she retorted. "Just wait till you go west and visit Cousin Antonina, looking as much like Great-grandmamma Pocahontas as you do! When I told her we were

descendants of hers she said, 'Sh-sh, my dear! People don't talk about being related to Indians out here in the west!'"

"Far be it from me to visit Cousin Antonina, or any cousin," said Janetta calmly. "Cousins should never visit one another."

Deborah, though she had been in the depths of gloom, could not resist a giggle at this. "What you say is fatally true," she said. "Oh, Jan, *when* do you suppose she will go home?"

"When the Fall renting season begins," said Janetta, "and this handsome but aged house of ours becomes chillier than the steam-heated apartment in New York that she's going to badger poor Douglas into taking. It will be beyond his means."

"We're inhospitable brutes," said Deborah remorsefully.

"We are not," said the more ruthless Janetta.

The "she" of whom they spoke was not Cousin Antonina, who was then living happily in her own opulent California bungalow. Their second cousin, Douglas Goldsborough, had spent the past three years in New York, alone and shy. The third of

these years Cousin Ellaline had overtaken him, adding one more to the list of those marriages fated to be the source of eternal wonderment to all relatives and friends. Ellaline was tall, faded and affectionate, very certain of her own beauty and gentility, and the type of in-law who tempts apologetic explanations to outsiders. Bentonburg, unfortunately for its inhabitants, was a delightful place in the summer. And Cousin Ellaline, with her infant, had spent the last five weeks with the Goldsborough family, and seemed to like it too well to go away.

"Ellaline," Janetta went on, "came for a week-end. Douglas has hinted to her over and over again—as much as he dares, poor Doug—that she'd better go back to the city. She knows perfectly well that a small and howling baby all over the place doesn't add to the comfort of a large, closely-packed, hard-working family. She doesn't specially like us. Abstract hospitality——"

"Well, there *is* abstract hospitality," said Deborah drearily.

"I know it. We all have it in an aggravated

form," admitted Janetta. "And we will urge her to stay until the last breeze of autumn . . . and she doesn't even make her own bed."

Deborah laughed.

"I suppose the care of a baby *is* a lot of trouble."

Janetta came over to the corner where Deborah was coiled.

"Debby, didn't you hear me tell you to get up and prink? Isn't Gray coming over in about an hour?"

"Yes," said Deborah lifelessly. "I'm all dressed."

"What *is* the matter, then? You aren't sorrowing about Ellaline, are you? We manage to have mighty good times just the same."

"N-not exactly . . . Gray's coming over."

"Why, of course! But *that* isn't saddening you, is it?"

"No. But this—this is a sort of extra-special comeover," explained Deborah meekly, still from the darkest corner. "He wants me to tell him when we're going to get married, and—and I don't know!"

"Well, you ought to know," said Janetta severely. "Any girl ought to be glad to marry as nice a boy as Gray just whenever he wants her to. You've been engaged almost a year now. Aren't you as much in love with him as you thought you were?"

At this brutal questioning Deborah came out into the open, otherwise the middle of the room. She had on her newest yellow voile with the black velvet knots, Janetta was glad to observe, and her hair had been carefully done.

"Oh, I know how long I've been engaged to him, honey. And I know Gray's the dearest fellow on earth, *lots* nicer than any old beau *you* ever had! Anybody who wasn't positive she adored him and didn't want to marry him on sight would be an idiot. The trouble's—me!"

"You! why, how, then——" asked Janetta, very naturally, turning around and regarding Deborah, who slid down into a rocking-chair and folded her hands and explained.

"I've been reading some articles on How to be a Wife," said Deborah out of a clear sky. "I

thought I'd better, you know. And I qualify all right on cooking and amiability and looks and all that——"

"You vain little thing!"

"and affection and neatness and knowledge of plumbing. But the most important thing I haven't got at all. And the articles all say you mustn't marry till you have it."

Janetta laughed, rather relieved. She had been afraid it was something more serious.

"Well, tell me the worst," she said. "Can't you mix mortar, or haven't you learned how to set type, or what?"

"But—but, Jan, this is really serious!" she said. "He wants to set the day to-night. And I have a strong feeling that it will be a very speedy one—this fall at least. And I want to be sure he gets the right girl."

"You want to be sure he knows he's getting the right girl," her sister corrected her. "Well, he is. That's one beauty about a Southerner. They certainly are perfect lovers."

"But Gray deserves the very best, finest, wifiest

sort of a wife, and you know it. And there's something dreadfully, dreadfully necessary, that I haven't at all!"

"Well, what?" asked Janetta impatiently.

"The Mother-Instinct!" said Deborah solemnly, and with an emphasis that implied capital letters at the very least.

"The—what?" asked Janetta feebly, turning up another light.

"The Mother-Instinct!" Deborah repeated even more solemnly. "Every one of the things I've read says that normal, sweet, womanly girls all are crazy over babies. Absolutely crazy, no matter how limp or new the babies are, or how red and yelpy. And—I'm not!"

"Why, you fraud!" said Janetta. "Mary Virginia and Dot own you body and soul." Mary Virginia and Dot were a couple of small girls next door, who were Deborah's especial pets.

"Yes, but Mary Virginia and Dot aren't babies," said Deborah. "Mary Virginia's three and Dot's five. And they're the dearest, sweetest, honeyest babies that ever lived. Anybody'd love

them. That isn't what the books and articles mean. It means that you ought to love real live babies, that aren't pretty and aren't old enough to have anything nice about them."

"You like babies quite enough," said Janetta. "Those things you've been reading are silly."

"But I never know what to do with Cousin Ellaline's baby," said Deborah plaintively, "except to put his stopper in!"

"Oh, hush, Deborah!" said Janetta, biting her handkerchief in an attempt to stop laughing, and then looking apprehensively back over her shoulder. "She'll hear you! Her room's on this floor."

"I don't care if she does," said Deborah defiantly. "She's only a cousin-in-law, anyhow, and it *was* only a week-end invitation, and she and Dodo are staying and staying and staying."

"I shouldn't mind if she weren't so impossible," said Janetta. "I love company. And, anyway, it isn't Dodo's fault, poor little thing."

CHAPTER FOUR

"ANYWAY," said Deborah firmly, "I'm going to practise on Dodo to-night. I shall take Ellaline's regular hint about staying with him, while she goes to get just one breath of evening air. And if I don't turn out to have the right amount of Mother-Instinct, why—Gray will just have to wait till I do—that's all!"

"Mercy, Deb!" said her sister, beginning to laugh again. "You talk about yourself as if you were muffins! Why on earth do you want to start on poor little Dodo? I never saw a baby in my life that was so hard to get to sleep."

"Then I'll have all the longer to acquire the taste for babies," said Deborah bravely. "Come, Janetta, don't you want me to be womanly?"

"Be as womanly as you like," said Janetta, "but for gracious sake don't start on Ellaline's baby! And now come on downstairs and wait for Gray Legare, like a sensible girl. You *are* so romantic!"

"I suppose I am," said Deborah submissively, and followed her sister downstairs, and out on the front porch.

The Goldsborough family, large and cheerful-minded as it was, had been what Sandy flippantly called "well beau-broken." No suitor had to ford his embarrassed way through waves of relatives when calling there on the lady of his choice. From Angela to Isabella they made the way easy for one another, and even suppressed their brothers when it was necessary. If a couple of men wanted to see two, or three, of the girls, they could and did, in a pleasant and amiable fashion. But a man who was unmistakably interested in only one of the sisters had no horrible gauntlets to run. He could and did see her in peace.

Cousin Ellaline, however, had never learned this unwritten law of a courteous family, and, mistaking Gray Legare's natural charm of manner for a personal devotion to herself, had a way of being on the lookout for him that almost drove the young man to drink at times; for he was in that state of mind where even a South Carolinian can see only

one girl in the world. And Janetta, poised for flight, had scarcely planted Deborah on the little screened-in side-porch that had been given over to her and Gray, when Cousin Ellaline appeared with a swish of silk petticoat.

"Isn't it the most adorable evening? How is our little sweetheart girlie this evening?"

Usually when Ellaline frisked Deborah had to be kept within the bounds of politeness by forcible pokes, and at that she was likely to say things about sportive cows under her breath. But to-night she bore it like a hero.

"I'll put Dodo to sleep to-night," she announced breathlessly, before her courage should fail. "Is he in bed yet?"

"Yes, indeed, my birdie's in his little nest," said Ellaline cheerfully. "I just ran down for one breath of summer air——"

"Then I'll go up now," said Deborah; and was gone in a flurry of sash-ends, in the direction of a small, catlike complaining above.

Dodo was really not the best sort of baby to acquire the taste on. Ellaline cared more for ruf-

flies than she did for perfect cleanliness, and also her baby hadn't much hair, and was badly sunburned and peeling. He had very baggy cheeks, and believed in letting people guess what he wanted rather than telling them by any of the means known to kind-hearted babies. Deborah eyed him with a mixture of pity and distaste, and sat down gingerly beside him. He was safety-pinned under what seemed a great many blankets for a summer night, but she did not dare change anything, for fear the mewing would become a howl.

"Dodo," said Deborah, "if you were in a cradle I could rock you, and if you were in a bassinette I could joggle it. But as it is, I don't see anything before me but a thinking part."

While she talked Dodo stopped his own conversation and watched her. He did not exactly approve of her, for she had held him once, at the wrong end. But he said nothing till she was through. Then he began to cry again, doggedly.

"Oh, dear, do you have to do that?" said Deborah wearily. Then a heaven-sent thought came to her. She would sing him to sleep. That was

what you always did with babies. She began a lullaby, very softly at first, but warming gradually to her work, and by the end of the first verse beginning to feel really maternal. It was a good thing she did, for she never had the time afterward.

"Yow-w-w! Ya-a-oow! Ya-a-a-o-o-w!" howled Dodo loudly at the first line of the second stanza. Deborah sang on diligently. Suddenly she broke off. For in a breathing-space between howls she heard steps on the porch below, and then a voice—Gray's—talking to Ellaline!

Now Ellaline would surely come up and take the baby! But no—the voices went on, accompanied presently by a sound of rocking. So Ellaline was sitting complacently on the porch, talking to Gray, while she, Deborah, was trying to hush Ellaline's horrid, cross, damp, bellowing baby to sleep—a baby who did not appreciate her best songs or most virtuous intentions! Deborah's temper came dangerously near being lost. Then she remembered why she was here, and began again, on a hymn this time. But Dodo's spirit was up. He followed her

in a steady crescendo that sounded like a fox terrier objecting to a violin. Deborah gave up the contest.

"I wonder if a bath would soothe you," said Deborah, considering. Dodo stopped as she spoke. "The very mention of it does," said she. "I'll try it, babykins. It certainly won't do you any harm, and it may quiet your overwrought nerves."

She ran across to the bathroom and came back with all the necessaries she could remember from the women's magazines she had been reading so assiduously lately; a square of oilcloth, soap, warm water, powder, a soft cloth. She lifted Dodo, very much as she would have a caterpillar.

"I believe she puts you to bed in your day-clothes, you poor little soul!" she said as she undid baby-pins and pulled off layers of clothing.

Dodo howled on, uncheered by her sympathy. He had seen the water, which his mother always hid from him till he was on its brink, and he hated water like a cat. As Deborah stripped off the last band he stiffened suddenly, and jerked. The result was a bang at the bottom of the tub, and a jet of soapy water across the front of her fresh yellow

frock. It did not make her feel any the more maternal, but she went stubbornly on with the wash-cloth, and doubtless did the baby a great deal of good.

When as much of him was washed as his wild struggles allowed, Deborah looked around for towels. As she had completely forgotten them, they were naturally not within reach. By the time she had been to the linen-closet and back, Dodo had managed to upset his tub, and, calmed for the moment by the sponge he was eating, sat placidly in a puddle which was rapidly widening to include everything on the floor. It took two towels to sop it up. By then, Dodo, deprived of his sponge, was howling again.

Deborah picked him up with an irritated, authoritative jerk. He seemed to understand and respect it, for he stopped for three full breaths. She dried him, laid him on the bed, and got a nightgown for him. Then, leaving him to mourn alone, she set about picking up the articles the water had reached. Ellaline had left several things on the floor when she came down to dinner, and Dodo's

performance had ruined eight auburn puffs, a pair of sixteen-button kids, and a messaline sash.

Still Dodo howled, clean and powdered and cool though he was, and soothed though he should have been. And presently, so great is the force of example, Deborah began to cry too.

"I might as well stay up here forever," she sobbed, dabbing ineffectually, as she cried, at her stained skirt, "for I never, never can marry Gray! I did use to think I could like babies if I ever got right down to it—even you, you forlorn little thing! And you've smashed every scrap of mother-instinct, or whatever it was, I ever could have had! And I do love Gray lots—and the more I see of you the more I hate you, you nasty, horrid, rude, howly little baby you! I haven't any more maternal instinct than a crocodile—and I don't—c-care!"

"Yo-ow-w-w! Wa-a-a-a! Wa-a-a-ooo!" said Dodo sympathetically.

"The girl who could get up any maternal emotions over you would have to be deaf and blind and senseless!" said Deborah.

Dodo replied in the same language he had been

using all along. It was the last straw. Deborah turned and ran downstairs, and was out among the others on the porch like a blond whirlwind.

"Ellaline!" she panted, "go upstairs to your horrid baby! I can't make him stop! I've sung to him till I'm tired, and washed him—I've washed him till he was nearly clean! And he just howls and howls and *howls!*"

Gray looked at his fiancée with a certain surprise. He had seen Deborah gay before, or sad, or wistful, and very often loving; but he had never happened to come across her before when she was driven to the wall. She was exceedingly pretty that way. He half rose to speak to her, but she scarcely saw him, she was so upset by what she had been through. Ellaline, poised as ever, smiled amiably on Deborah.

"Oh, sang to him?" she queried, rocking placidly on. "Why, that must have been what the matter was. I thought you knew that, dearie. You know," she explained to Gray, who was not listening to her in the least, "I gave costume readings before I married dear Douglas. I generally start

Dodo with 'Lasca' *with* the gestures. If that doesn't send him off, 'Ostler Joe' always will."

Above, Dodo continued to wail for his missing recital, "*with* the gestures." Ellaline continued to rock below, on the side-porch sacred to Gray and Deborah. "You might try him with 'Bingen on the Rhine,'" said she, "or 'The Blue and the Gray.' You used to know that, didn't you, dearie?"

The tornado broke. "No, I never did!" cried Deborah. "And I hate babies! Go speak pieces to your own child!"

She fled back into the house, and hurled herself on the nearest couch in the unlighted living-room. Fortunately it was empty, except for Carrie Chapman, who rose with a dignified, if hurt, mew, on being fallen on, and got underneath the table. Deborah, usually the tenderest of living girls to everything alive, did not even notice what she had done. She was too heartbroken. She was a complete failure at loving a baby for even a half-hour, and, worse than that, she had disgraced herself before Gray, who had told her only the night before that she was the most perfect girl in the world, and ought

to live on a pedestal, only he wanted her in his arms instead. . . . He would never say nice things like that to her again—he knew her only too well now!—and the boys might come in any moment, and she wouldn't even be able to have her cry out in comfort, and she couldn't go upstairs without bumping into Cousin Ellaline, doubtless. It was a hopeless and a shattered world.

Somebody had come in very softly, and was sitting down beside her and putting two arms close around her . . . lifting her bodily close to a well-known shoulder.

"Oh Gray!" sobbed Deborah.

"Why, you poor little darling!" said Gray Legare tenderly. "You've worn yourself all out on that yelping little nuisance. What did you do it for, when you knew your sweetheart was coming?"

So he didn't hate her, or feel disillusioned, after all? She sat up and pushed her honey-colored hair out of her wet eyes.

"That's just it," sobbed Deborah. "I c-can't tell you. And I never, never can marry you, either. Never, no matter how much I want to!"

"What's that?" said Gray, like a whip cracking.

"No, I can't," wept Deborah, "and I want to ever so much, too!"

Gray stopped talking for a moment, and began to think hard instead, keeping up a vigorous patting the while. Now Gray was a clever young man, or he would never have been fallen in love with at first sight by Deborah Goldsborough.

"You sweetest little absolute goosie!" said he finally. "Of course you're going to marry me. Right at the end of the summer, too. What do you think I care whether—whether you lost your dear little temper over that miserable baby of your cousin's? There, there, dear. You're the sweetest, womanliest little darling I ever knew. To think of your—it was bully of you to help her out that way. . . . We're going to get married very soon, aren't we, dear? And now come on out to the porch, darling. I like your family, but there's an awful lot of it, and there may be seven or eight of them in any minute. Your cousin-in-law's gone upstairs."

Deborah said nothing. She sniffed softly and

burrowed a little deeper into the shoulder. Then, always with her face averted, she let him lead her out to their private porch.

"Well, dear?" he said when they were settled in peace and privacy.

"Just what you say," said Deborah meekly.

"I knew you would," said Gray cheerfully. "Now let's begin to talk about it. Where do you think——"

"Oh, Gray, you *are* such a nice boy!" said Deborah, lifting up her head a little—just enough to be kissed.

"You darling!"

"And—and, Gray——"

"Yes, Sweetheart?"

"Gray, it—it *was* a *dear* little baby, after all!"

CHAPTER FIVE

"It must be hard," said Isabella pensively, "to have all your life behind you."

Deborah, to whom this remark was addressed, lifted her drooping dun-gold head from bending above a georgette camisole, and eyed her youngest sister coldly.

"Just what do you mean by my having my life behind me—or did you mean me?" she inquired.

The severity of Deborah's sweet voice would have cowed most younger sisters, but Isabella was uncrushable. She lifted *her* head, which possessed a delightful rain of brown curls, from another article of Deborah's trousseau, and replied undauntedly:

"Well, of course, you don't mind it, or you wouldn't be doing it. I was just thinking how dreadful I'd feel if I knew I had to be married next fall, and stay married to the same man for the rest of my natural life. Ugh! It would feel like a jail sentence."

"There's no danger," said Deborah sweetly. "And there mayn't ever be, Belle. You may be allowed unfettered freedom to your dying day."

Isabella, aged nearly sixteen, burst into unaffectedly joyous laughter over Deborah's neat retort, and applied herself to the pink crêpe garment she was hemstitching. By one of those contradictions which are so frequent in a family, Isabella, the tomboy, could do the best embroidery of all the sisters. She sewed on in silence to the end of her row, then rose lightly and strolled to the window.

"There's Annice sitting under a tree, reading Jane Austen, I'll bet a cooky," she observed. "Do you know, I think the real trouble is that I'm so sorry for people when they aren't me. It's so nice to be the youngest. I should think, though, it mightn't be bad to be the oldest, either. Angela gets a lot out of it. But there's poor old Nan; her position in the family hasn't a redeeming point. She isn't the oldest, or the youngest, or the prettiest, or the cleverest, or the fairest, or the darkest——"

"You sound like the water coming down at Lodore," said Janetta, standing in the doorway of

the old dining-room where the girls congregated, and unspiking her hat with a practised hand. You simply had to sit on Isabella, or there was no living with her, as even gentle Angela agreed. "Girls, our title to that tract of land of Grandfather Goldsborough's is all right, and Mr. Montgomery says I can take what time I want next week to fixing it up to sell in building lots!"

It was quite a worthless bit of land that the family had held on to more as a matter of family pride than anything else; and Janetta, who was as ingenious as she was handsome, had lately conceived the plan of making it into a residential section, as there wasn't anything else to do with it. If her plan worked ever so little, there would be at least pin-money in it for every member of the family. So Isabella's meditations on Annice were forgotten in the joyful noise Janetta's news created.

But it *was* very hard on Annice Goldsborough—being a Goldsborough girl. If she had been the sole daughter of Mrs. Grace, down at the stone house with the terrace, or one of the two England girls out by the Merion road, or even one of the

Williams trio, she would have had a reputation as a tearing beauty. But Deborah was so tall and lissom and cream-and-gold, and Angela so rose-and-white and flaxen, and Janetta so masterful and Indian-handsome, that, as Isabella had said, it quite drowned out Annice, being one of the handsome Goldsboroughs.

People just said of her casually: "Oh, yes, she's pretty." Or, "Oh, yes, she's clever—all the Goldsboroughs are. You know, the big family of boys and girls in that old Colonial house on Jefferson Street. They have everything but money!"

And they let it go at that.

It was uncomfortable for Annice in other ways besides being eclipsed in beauty and charm. She wasn't an especially vain girl, and she adored her sisters. But she *was* in just the wrong place in the family for various sorts of consideration. By the time you've had four daughters you get careless. Annice was likely to go short in the matter of pin-money and frocks, and of notice, too. The Goldsborough father and mother, after twenty-eight years of matrimony, were as much in love with each

other as they had been at first. So they were very far from the conventional parents who blight their children's lives by too much attention and devotion. They liked their boys and girls well enough, but they didn't worry especially, and so the eight grew up cheerful, unruly, dominant, careless youngsters.

All but Annice, again. She looked uncannily like the portrait of the great-aunt for whom she was named. She had a little flushed oval face with long, drooping-lashed eyes, a wistful expression, and an unbelievably small red mouth; hair that was so straight and dusky and heavy that it seemed to cry out to be parted and looped over her ears, Victorian fashion. Indeed, there's no use concealing it, Annice *was* very Victorian. She read a great deal, had very gentle, quiet ways, and a fund of determination and persistency that was sometimes a nuisance even to herself.

It was this spring, before Deborah was married that she first discovered how determined and persistent she was, and her family, so to speak, discovered her.

She was sitting in the window of the big, sunny,

shabby dining-room, helping her mother and sisters hold the usual clinic on last year's dresses. The Goldsborough way was to cast their garments into a common pool, and re-evolve others from them, on the principle of a kaleidoscope. It worked very well.

Annice, this spring day, lifted her head from the consideration of Janetta's last year's blue voile. The conclave had decided that it would do better for Annice than for anybody else.

"And Janetta will have to get something new, being so much seen and all," decided Angela. "It had better be a nice dark-blue silk; then she can wear it right through the year."

Janetta had virtual charge of the town's real-estate office, and was its most decorative asset.

"Do you know," Annice fired suddenly at her family, "that I'm the only one of the whole lot of you that's never had a silk dress?"

Her calm mother turned Angela's last year's brown serge on her knee and brushed back a lock of still pretty brown hair from her forehead with a still pretty hand.

"That's so, dear," she said. "I believe you never have."

Annice sat up straight on the window-seat and jerked at a cushion.

"All the other girls have," she said. "Even Isabella had a little white habutai last year to graduate from high school in."

"I'm the youngest," said Isabella sweetly. "And anyway, it ought to have been a messaline. All the rest of the girls' were."

"And Angela's the oldest, and Debby's the prettiest, and Jan needs it because she works where people see her—and I never, never get anything at all in the whole world!" wailed Annice bitterly. "I hate other people's clothes. I think I ought to have one new dress before I die: a good, expensive silk. I never——"

By this time the entire family was frozen in astonishment, and Annice herself rather surprised. She was more surprised still when she found herself casting Janetta's voile on the carpet and running out of the room in tears.

The family gazed at itself in astonishment—more astonishment.

"It must be the spring," suggested Deborah, who was herself feeling acutely this particular spring.

"It's sewing too much," said fluffy Angela remorsefully.

"It's just plain pig-headedness," scornfully said the brown-curled and adorable Isabella.

And although the family rebuked her severely before it departed in a body to find and cheer Annice, Isabella was quite as right as the rest. Annice wanted that silk gown so obstinately that for days afterward she cried whenever she thought even remotely about it.

"But, dear, there are so many of us that we all have to go without things," explained her mother, and went on every day to detail the reasons.

Nothing moved Annice, heretofore the gentlest of the Goldsborough girls. But in a week she stopped talking about it. Not that she stopped revolving ways and means. At night, indeed, she regularly dreamed that she had broken into Black's store over in the next town, and successfully stolen

the white taffeta in the window. By day she steadfastly did her share of the work, which was half of the family sewing, and read and dreamed in the library when her sewing was through. As the spring days became warmer, she took her books or her work out under the trees. She fell to pondering ways of earning money, but without success. Janetta and Angela, who taught music, did that; she and Deborah were needed at home to help keep the machinery running.

So spring and Janetta's blue taffeta, and summer and Angela's rose chiffon that she had to have for her pupils' recital, and fall and Deborah's brown crêpe meteor that was her going-away gown, all passed before Annice found any way to the silk gown that was her heart's desire.

Most girls would have forgotten it, in the joy of being a white organdy bridesmaid, but not so Annice. She held up Deborah's train and looked at it before the bride swept into the fine old parlors at the end of a line of sisters, with the recollection that it was Great-grandmother Everingham's brocade, which was undoubtedly a

silk. Gray Legare was not rich, but he was comfortably off, and Deborah could have walked in silk attire to the end of her days if she wanted to. Then Annice felt remorseful for her thoughts, for she genuinely loved dreamy, mercurial, lovable Deborah, and kissed her sister with an extra fervor.

Nevertheless—such a tyrant is an indomitable will—when the bride was gone, and the rest of the girls had dropped in a heap on the floor among the wilted flowers and tangle of satin ribbon to talk it over cozily, Annice found her mind reverting again to the fact that she had never had a silk gown. And that she must find a way to get it. But the way seemed hard to find.

CHAPTER SIX

When she did find it, it led from her favorite haunt, the library. There was a fat, dingy-brown leather book that came off on her hands in streaks. She pulled it out one day in sheer boredom, then dropped down by the bookcase to read it in sheer absent-mindedness.

And then she clasped her hands and caught her breath and said, "Oh-h!" Then, "I wonder if I dare?" she breathed. Then a quiet, resolved, Victorian look came over her. "I'd dare *anything* for a silk dress," vowed Annice to the streaky book. "But oh——"

It was not a ladylike means at all that presented itself to her. Laws are rarely ladylike. And this law, unrepealed since the glorious Goldsborough days of George Washington's friendship, stated explicitly that, in the state in which Annice lived, if a spinster asked an unengaged bachelor to marry her in leap year, and he wouldn't, he *had*

to give her a silk dress! That was all. It was quite certainly there. And if the bachelor wouldn't, he was fined a great deal, and the court gave the spinster the money. There are curious things in the statute books.

Annice looked again, to make sure. But there was no question of the law's validity. "If a bachelor of marriageable age," it said severely, "shall be asked in marriage by a marriageable spinster, and shall refuse her, always and supposing that he hath no other affiancement or engagement of any character, she shall be enabled by due process of law to mulct him in one silk dress or its equivalent in silver or merchandise. And if he doth not willingly accede to her demands for the said silk dress, or its value in silver or merchandise——"

Well, the sense of it was that he had to go to jail if he wouldn't produce the silk dress.

Annice, slim, gentle, passionately obstinate, looked at the law there in its prosy print all trimmed with stars and daggers and brackets and footnotes, and flushed and laughed and frowned and shook her head, and spent all day deciding not to do it. She

spent the next day deciding that she would. The third day was spent in a truly dreadful state of mind, all tossed about and confused as much as possible. Finally (it was after she'd had to wear Janetta's voile to a tea), she clutched her courage hard in both small brown hands and decided once and for all that—she *would*.

"I just *have* to have it!" she told herself desperately, her heart pounding as if she'd been running up-hill. For Annice didn't know much about men, and strongly desired to choose a victim who would refuse her as politely as possible. "If he were cross about it," she said to herself, her throat catching, panic-stricken, "what *should* I do?"

So she sought Isabella.

Isabella may have been the youngest, but she knew more about men than most people, having been born that way. And she was young enough to be still frank about what she knew. Annice found her lying in the center of the bed the two girls occupied, doing her nails in a dreamy and deliberate manner.

"Come sit down and talk, Nan," she called. "I

never see anything of you these days; you're always mooning in corners."

Isabella was very much attached to Annice, though she considered her very unmodern, and received little sympathy from her in her ambition, which was to go and be a film-star next year. She stretched out her hand and pulled Annice's skirt, and her elder yielded. Annice always did yield sweetly to people in little things. She lay by her sister and watched her in silence for five minutes.

"I'll do yours," Isabella offered presently, having finished her own. She reached out for Annice's nearer hand. Annice let her gratefully. At about the middle finger she spoke.

"Belle, what man in this place would you say was the least likely to marry anybody?"

Belle did not stop a moment before answering. "Arnold Salter," she replied, as she began on the ring-finger.

Annice gave a wriggle that was nearly disastrous to her nail. "Oh, yes!" she said. "And oh, Belle, I do feel so wicked!"

"Why?" Isabella naturally inquired. Isabella

had never felt wicked in her life and doubtless never would. She did things or she didn't, and that was all, and she had little respect for more Victorian points of view. "You needn't feel wicked on account of Salter, because he's so rich we never meet him to speak of, and we have such lots more ancestors than he has that we mightn't even if we could—though I don't know about that."

"I'd trade a few of the ancestors for Mr. Salter's money," spoke Annice rebelliously.

Isabella looked at her in surprise. It didn't sound a bit like her. Annice had always "roosted in the family tree," as her junior put it, with persistence, and regarded the bed where Washington, that gipsy-hearted president, had slept, as so sacred that antique dealers knew they had to get it over her dead body. She wouldn't even let her mother move it out of the guest-chamber to put in a brass cot.

Annice continued to lie on the bed and feel tragic. Mr. Salter was obviously her destined victim—and having an actual victim picked out made it seem so terrible!

Arnold Salter was thirty-five. His ancestor had been shoeing the Continental horses along about the time the Goldsboroughs were giving their little dinners to the General and his staff. And whether because horse-shoeing is more lucrative than dinner-giving, or what-not, each generation had seen the Salters better and better off; till now Arnold was the richest man in the county. He was handsome, slow of speech, quiet, and a little stiff in manner, and he lived by himself in a beautiful old house that looked excellently ancestral, and, in fact, was four generations old. In New York City it would have been a feudal castle, as regards age, but in this drowsy, courteous Pennsylvania town it was considered rather young. He was supposed to have foiled more girls who wanted to marry him than any man in the state. He was a very clever lawyer. Perhaps that helped him. They dashed up against him like pretty, frothy waves against a hard brown rock. Or so it was said. He was also very just and law-abiding. Altogether he was pointed out by the finger of fate.

Annice shuddered again—but she began to plan.

She said no more to her sister. Isabella knew too many things now, without being told any more. She lay quietly back among the pillows and thought about more details.

"It wouldn't be fair to spring it on him when he'd never met me to speak of," she decided with that conscientiousness which was so notably a part of her. It seemed dreadful to go deliberately where he was, too. But Annice was nothing if not sportsmanlike. And also, way back in her mind, she had a feeling that if Salter could be made to see that she was running after him, it might make his refusal doubly sure. But where could she see him, in order to give this imitation of hunting him down which was necessary? She did not dare ask Isabella; it might bring suspicion down on her.

She thought for several minutes. Where could she drop in that he dropped in, quite brazenly? "Mrs. Molineaux," came the inspiration. Mrs. Molineaux was a nice old lady with wavy gray hair who had been Salter's mother's best friend. At one time it had been a matter for scornful humor with the Goldsborough girls, the way their friends lav-

ished attention on the lady when Arnold might be expected to drop in on her, too. The Goldsboroughs had never needed to do anything like that. There were always "a bunch of men cluttering up the place," as their brothers said disgustedly, yet with a certain pride.

Annice had little to do in the house at this season of the year. It was just about three in the afternoon, and she had about time enough to dress and call on the Molineaux lady. When she got there, she would inquire, still quite brazenly, what days Salter might be expected.

Angela was closer to Annice's size than any of the others. She also had the best clothes of the family, now that Deborah was married and gone. She was out this afternoon giving lessons, and her wardrobe lay at the world's mercy. Angela, finally, was Annice's special elder sister.

Annice had been teased so many years about her resemblance to steel engravings in Sir Walter Scott's books and her Victorian graces that she hated it, and tried to look as modern as she could. But to-day, flinging Angela's wardrobe doors wide,

she determined to live up to her type as extremely as possible. He surely wouldn't like *that!* There was a gray chiffon on Angela's hangers that was fichued, tight-waisted, and wide-skirted in a way that was the very last cry of fashion at the time, as well as unusually Civil-Warish in its effect. Somebody, too, had sent Angela enormous amounts of pink roses, and suggestively near them lay a wide gray felt hat with a drooping pink plume. Angela got concert work to do these days, oftener and oftener, and there had to be hats for afternoon recitals sometimes.

Annice solemnly put on everything she could find, feeling as if it were a rite. Angela's gray shoes, her hat, her gray suède gloves, a half-dozen of the fresh pink roses from under Tom Cheyney's card—even a necklace that ended in a cameo. Then she hunted up her own coat and furs and a cardcase, and started forth as resolutely as if the Holy Grail lay at the end of her walk.

"When I get a chance," she planned, "I'll say, 'Oh, by the way, Mrs. Molineaux, what days does Mr. Salter generally come here?' And she'll have

to tell me, and I'll come then, too. I should think two calls would prepare him."

She had forgotten how lovely Mrs. Molineaux's perfect old rooms were. Their mistress greeted her with a delight that made her feel almost guilty and set her in a chair that matched her perfectly—a high, carved old chair comfortably near the generous open fire.

"Why, how pretty you are, my dear," said Mrs. Molineaux frankly, when her visitor was uncoated and settled. "I don't believe I've seen enough of you before to realize it. You are always so surrounded by big sisters."

"Well, last year I wasn't exactly grown up, or at least I didn't feel so," Annice acknowledged, all her old-fashioned dimples coming out at the compliment.

"So you weren't," smiled Mrs. Molineaux, who had such friendly eyes under her gray hair that Annice presently forgot her demon errand, and began to talk happily and have a good time. By the time the toast and tea came in, indeed, Annice was sitting forward in her quaint, rose-decked frock,

gayly telling Mrs. Molineaux something funny that had just happened to her and Isabella. She was chattering so happily between bites that she never heard Arnold Salter come in at all.

When she did see him, he was kissing Mrs. Molineaux. After that she saw him eying her a little surprisedly, as if he scarcely remembered her at all. He had large black eyes, she found, rather terrifyingly direct, strongly curling black hair, and altogether a rather Roman look. She had never had much chance or inclination to observe his looks thoroughly before. Neither had he seen her, it appeared, because he kept on watching her long after Mrs. Molineaux had finished explaining which of the Goldsborough girls she was. It worried Annice at first, his watching her. Then it excited her. And then she actually rose up and crossed over before the fire and sat on a low thing near him, and began to talk and look up as brazenly as she knew how.

"It must look exactly like vulgar flirting," she told herself with a mixture of satisfaction and shame.

But there was one fatal drawback to the effect of Annice's machinations, which, fortunately for herself, she did not know. She was so sweet and gentle-mannered and childlike, and so natural in her old-fashioned charm, that it would have taken a whole board of lawyers to convince either of her hearers that she knew what guile was. And it's probable that the lawyers would have been wrong, at that!

Sad to say, in a little while she again forgot the real object of the call. Arnold Salter may have had stiff ways—he may even have been on his guard against wily females, but when a little girl with large eyes and flushed cheeks and pink roses tells you about her rabbits, and the clever way she and her sister painted the living-room carpet to look like new before Aunt Janetta arrived, there's no need to be guarded.

The net result was that after two hours of pleasant conversation Arnold Salter walked home with her. She was having such a good time that she never remembered to be forward at all till he'd left her at the doorstep. Then—he had gone a lit-

tle way back—she did remember and ran after him.

"Mr. Salter, Mr. Salter!" she called. "When are you going to be at Mrs. Molineaux's again?"

"I think I may be there day after to-morrow," he said promptly. "In fact, I know I shall—if not to-morrow."

"Then I'm going, too," said Annice breathlessly. After that she turned and ran.

"Now he *will* know!" she assured herself as she dashed away with her cheeks scarlet.

It was fortunate she did not hear the sought-after Mr. Salter say as he went off smiling: "What a little darling! That's the first natural girl I've seen for ten years. What a pity she has to grow up."

And after that he did arithmetic the rest of the way home, in an aimless sort of way. He scarcely knew why he was doing it. But he was taking eighteen from thirty-five. The sum came out quite the same every time, and the result—again he scarcely knew why—annoyed him.

Annice regained the bosom of her family without

occasioning much comment. Angela said placidly: "Oh, that's where my gray dress went?" and Isabella exclaimed: "Jinks! but you look stunning! Why the get-up?" And her father said proudly: "You look more and more like Great-Aunt Annice. Doesn't she, Milly?" And her mother said: "We thought she would, you know, when we named her."

And that was practically all that happened, much to Annice's relief. Nobody even asked where she'd been, until, indeed, Isabella inquired casually just before she dropped off to sleep.

"To see Mrs. Molineaux," Annice answered truthfully, and Isabella subsided with a little gurgle of laughter. It had escaped Annice's memory that ever since other maidens' pilgrimages to Mrs. Molineaux's had been a family joke, "calling on Mrs. Molineaux" had meant "somewhere I don't choose to tell" among the Goldsborough girls.

Annice was so glad to think how a whole day must elapse before she need go pursuing Salter again that she went about all those twenty-four hours in a state of silent joy. Then Thursday after-

noon, the time appointed for her second assault, came. She asked Angela for the clothes this time and got them immediately. The Goldsboroughs lived in an amiable communism as regarded clothes, anyway.

Annice started off again on her daring errand, curiously enough, rather pleasurably. This time Arnold Salter and she met as they were going into the Molineaux house.

"Oh, I'm glad," said he, quite boyishly. "Do you know, I came over yesterday, but you weren't here?"

"You didn't say for sure," Annice answered ungrammatically.

In they went, to Mrs. Molineaux's deep fire and soft candlelight and wise old talk, and another very, very pleasant two hours.

"I wonder," thought Annice as she eyed Arnold from under her lashes, "if we couldn't be friends even after—after it happened. It isn't as if he were going to hurt my feelings by refusing. Deborah and Angel and Jan always said a girl could keep men as friends after she refused them, if she did

it the right way. I don't see why it shouldn't work the other way about."

So then she told about a very rare old book she had just discovered and then about the frock she was making for Isabella. Both Arnold and Mrs. Molineaux listened intently, as if she were a very dear little girl indeed.

Arnold took her home again.

Then he went back to Mrs. Molineaux's, and pulled Annice's stool over close to the old lady, and sat there with his curly black head against her arm. Neither of them said anything for an appreciable length of time, not until Arnold remarked very devoutly under his breath, "Thank God for anachronisms!"

"She is the sweetest one I ever saw," Mrs. Molineaux responded.

"And do you think——?" said he, not at all in a proud or hopeful voice, and breaking off before he ended.

"I think all the best things in the world," said Mrs. Molineaux cheerfully. "Don't go too fast, Arnie, and you may be all right."

Annice intermitted her attentions after this. She went to several things unconnected with Arnold Salter, and, except that it struck her to wonder why he wasn't there, had excellent times. In a way, she had slipped into Deborah's niche.

One night, coming home gayly from a dance where she'd had more partners than any one girl could utilize, Isabella met her on the stairs, wide-eyed and bursting with information.

"Who do you think was here?" she demanded, "and spent the whole evening with Dad and Muddy and Angel and me? Arnold Salter, no less! We couldn't isolate him, 'cause he didn't ask for any special girl. Who do you 'spose it will turn out to be—Jan or Angel?"

"I—I don't know," said Annice confusedly.

"I think I know why he's letting himself run around loose like this and raise hopes. I think he's made up his mind to get married, and has the girl almost engaged, and feels immune. Elsie Reese saw her the other day; he was up in town with her on Chestnut Street. Big, stunning blonde, she said, and she looked as if she were a New Yorker."

Once more Annice lay awake planning. Somehow all the fun and daring were out of her adventure. But one thing was sure: she must do the fateful deed before Salter was actually engaged. She didn't like the idea of that blonde.

She made her way again, a little sadly, to Mrs. Molineaux's. Perhaps she could manage the proposal when he was coming home with her, she thought, and then wondered if the silk gown were worth it. But it wasn't the silk gown; it was that streak of obstinacy, persistence, call it what you will, in Annice's nature that made it flatly impossible for her to give up a thing, once started on it. She had to go on with it, just because she was Annice, and she knew it. But her steps dragged.

The lovely old room looked lovelier and more perfect than ever this afternoon. The fire crackled, and the shadows by the long curtains were very restful. Mrs. Molineaux was as charming and made her as welcome as ever. Arnold was there waiting for her. But after a little while, when tea had been brought in and poured, the old lady rose.

"There's a letter that absolutely must be writ-

ten," she explained. "But I won't be long, and I expect to find you both here when I come back. Mind, now!"

After she was gone, a little silence fell. Arnold Salter sat back in his big chair, with his brown hands on the arms, and stared straight before him. He did not look as dominant as usual; he even seemed a little tired. Annice moved a little nearer to him and began to talk more or less at random. It felt very intimate, being alone with him this way, he and she and the fire. Yet—somehow—it seemed as if it had been happening always. And she knew him so well! So well, curiously enough, that it made what she was going to do easier. She felt as if he understood everything about her so thoroughly that he almost knew she was going to do it.

While she was thinking, a silence fell without their noticing. Arnold broke it presently, speaking in a low, musing voice. "There are some things that take a good deal of courage even to think about doing. Do you know that, little Miss Annice?"

Annice looked at him in surprise, almost fear.

Was he a sorcerer, to read her thoughts so well? Only that intense driving force of persistence, which made it an impossibility for Annice to give up a course once planned, kept her to her resolve. It seemed useless, now—after all, why did she want a silk gown? But before she knew it she found herself speaking the words she had planned. She looked up at him with an apparent calm, even, it seemed to the man, with a poised gentleness.

"Mr. Salter," she asked softly, "wouldn't you like to—to marry me?"

She dropped her eyes and sat very, very still when she had said it. The silence in the room was so thick it felt like a fog. That is, for about forty seconds. By the forty-first she felt an impetuous rush, and two arms closing tight around her.

"You angel!" Arnold Salter was saying brokenly between the kisses he was giving her. "You little adorable, merciful angel!"

Annice forgot to think what he meant for a little while. He went on whispering pet names to her, and kissing her, and—why, regrettable to state, Annice felt so perfectly at home, so satisfied and

comfortable with his arms around her, and his words in her ear, that presently she found herself responding to him warmly.

But at length she began to use her mind again. It had been entirely unnecessary for the last fifteen minutes.

"What—what do you mean?" she asked tremulously.

He laughed.

"A little late to ask that, isn't it, sweetheart?" he asked triumphantly. "You knew I didn't dare, didn't you, dear? And you helped me, like the wonderful girl you are. Darling, I'll never forget it."

Annice leaned back against him and began to laugh. She was so happy she would have laughed anyway, but really the joke *was* on her.

"I see where I never get that silk gown!" she said.

"What do you mean?" demanded Arnold Salter, tipping up her face.

Annice came home, her lover beside her, rapt and

happy. At the gate she sent him away, and slipped in alone. She moved dreamily on in a golden world, to the old library. Her eyes shone with happiness, and her cheeks were burning roses. She didn't see anything or anyone; the world was too divine.

And so she nearly fell over Isabella, snatching a quiet nap in the biggest chair. Isabella sat up and blinked, then eyed radiant Annice severely.

"Good gracious, Nan," she cried, "what's happened? You look like an angel cat that's just eaten an angel canary. Has the world come to an end, or have you actually figured out how to get that silk dress after all?"

Annice looked at her junior with a dreamy, rapt, seraphic smile.

"It's going to be white satin," she said.

CHAPTER SEVEN

JANETTA was a wonderful girl; everybody said so. It didn't consist in doing any one thing, or being any one thing, better than the rest. But she had what her twin brother called a high batting average. The thing that had originally made her world admire her so had been very shocking, at first, to her friends and family; the job she had acquired and was holding at Montgomery's real-estate office. She could have dropped automatically into a mistress-ship at any one of the excellent private schools round about, which were all kept by old and dear friends of the family, but for three years now she had been the presiding genius of Montgomery's; and had secret ambitions about becoming a proprietor on her own account. There was a tract of land a little way outside the town, which had been kept more or less tax-paid-up for sentimental reasons since her great-grandfather's

[illegible]. And Janetta, getting wind of a trolley-car line to go through, was "developing" it.

It promised to become a residential section, and Janetta spent many healthful hours showing prospective buyers over its acres. She had reserved the best parts of it for lots for her own family. Janetta was a far-seeing young person.

"Some of us may not marry," she explained to John, who heard her out with a pretended scorn which covered deep admiration. "And you boys, when you do, will want to have the girls you marry somewhere near home. We all care too much for Bentonburg to go away from it. So it's well to have a place where we can settle."

"In other words, you're planning to have us be the oldest inhabitants of your little [illegible] improvement-section," said John.

"Well, if you want to deed your truck over to me," said his twin serenely, "I can sell it for enough to buy a new Ford. Mr. Montgomery's is showing signs of age, and I'd rather have one of my own, anyway."

But John thought he wouldn't. John was very much like Janetta, except that, being a girl, she was older for her age than he was for his. John had an excellent position in Philadelphia, to which he commuted with great content. He was making what would have been enough for the father of a family a generation ago; what was enough to get along with delightfully now. So they both laughed, ceased teasing each other, and—it was a half-holiday—went off to spend the afternoon together on the little creek two miles above them, and make plans for their twin futures. They meant to be rich some day, before they were too old to get any fun out of it.

John leaned back in the sunset and surveyed his twin thoughtfully.

"Jan, you're working too hard," he said.

Janetta laughed.

"That's what Arnold Salter said yesterday, when he and Annice came and got me in the car. He said I was looking thin—for which I was rapturously grateful—and that I ought to stop working or playing, he didn't care which. I suppose I *am*

burning the candle at both ends, but you're only young once."

"Nice, fatherly chap, Arnold," said John generously.

Jan laughed.

"Yes; his grave and meditative ways would drive me mad. He and Annice are exactly like people out of a mid-Victorian novel. She told me yesterday that it was so pleasant to lean on his strength and be guided by him."

John lifted one handsome black eyebrow.

"She mayn't know it and he mayn't know it, ever; but the person who's going to do the guiding in *that* family is going to be Annice. That invisible persistence of hers would make Napoleon himself do exactly what he was told, and think all the time what a first-class boss he was."

They both laughed again.

"You know too much for a man," said Janetta.

"But you *must* rest up a little more," said her brother seriously.

"I hate to miss any of the dances," said Janetta.

"We *have* had good dances this winter," ad-

mitted John. "Oh, by the way, here's a letter for you. I picked it up in the hall when I came through, and forgot it till now. It's from Aunt Janetta."

Janetta sighed.

"I suppose she still wants to adopt me," she said, laying her paddle across the canoe and tearing the envelope open.

"They're in Florida for the spring," she informed her brother, glancing down the spider-webbed pages. "And she wants me to come. I declare, I almost think I shall. There's a month's vacation coming to me that I couldn't take last year. I'll talk it over with the girls."

It did sound charming—Angela and Annice agreed to that, when the tale was spread before them and the mother.

"I am asking a house-party of six girls, and six charming young men," Aunt Janetta, Janetta's godmother, wrote sweetly. She *was* a dear. "And I have the loveliest plans for making the weeks pass beautifully. I want it to be an enchanted memory to all who come, to the end of their days."

Well, as they also agreed, Aunt Janetta certainly

could if she wanted to. She and Uncle Sylvester had no children; merely much money and an adoration for each other. So they were quite capable of strewing roses on their niece's pathway. The fact that they had always wanted to adopt Janetta, and that in spite of seven other children the Goldsborough parents had never been willing, had prevented some of the roses from falling in the right place.

Janetta the younger leaned back in her accustomed spot in the big, sunny dining-room, where the girls were wont to gather at off-times, and reread the letter. The work on the improvement had been hard, and she was fresh from the marriage of her most valued sister, Deborah the dreamy and temperamental. She missed Deborah more than she had thought possible.

"I'll go," she announced.

"Good girl," approved Angela. "And isn't it a blessing that Debby was so haughty about her old clothes, and wouldn't take anything but new ones away with her?" she added. "Now you can make a clean sweep of her wardrobe, Jan, and

astonish the Seminoles. I think that's what natives are called in Florida."

"It sounds like a pudding," said Janetta doubtfully. "It'll astonish Deb, too, when her heart begins to yearn after her rose-colored organdy, and that yellow voile that was always such a wonderful beau-dress."

"I wonder if she really did mean to leave them behind?" said Annice conscientiously.

"Whether she did or not, I don't," said Janetta. "Deborah has a perfectly good and most admiring husband, and what does she want of these vain gauds? I'll go now and look 'em over."

So Janetta and Annice, who did more of the family sewing than the others could, by reason of having no "outdoor job" as Sandy called it, worked valiantly till Janetta had a wardrobe more than sufficient for the four wild weeks her aunt promised her. She drew enough of her beloved savings out of bank to take her down to the Gulf, and took the train, followed by her family's congratulations to themselves on having seen her getting a rest at last.

Aunt Janetta met her at the steps of the cottage they had taken, as adoringly as ever, and full of plans. Janetta thought afterward that if her aunt could have waited till she had rested an hour before she heard the worst, she might have taken it differently. But as it was, she was shocked to the heart's core.

She sat down, just as she was, tall and businesslike and handsome and practical to her fingers' ends, and dropped her neat leather handbag helplessly beside her. She felt as if Aunt Janetta were hurling her headfirst into a valentine. The ornate little porch, heavily twined with flowering roses and clematis, and little fluffy, blue-eyed Aunt Janetta, like a doll grown old, standing appealingly above her, added to the illusion. She groped in her bag for a business card, to see if that would bring her back to earth. But nothing changed.

"What*ever* put it into your head?" she finally asked in a weak voice. She felt that the occasion demanded severity, but she simply couldn't be severe with a nice little aunt like that.

Aunt Janetta's eyes, a soft blue still, gazed wistfully out across the lawn.

"The memory of my own courtship, dear," she said gently. "It should have been the happiest time of my life, and it was the hardest, because Father didn't want me to marry at all, and especially disliked Sylvester. I—why, dear, I used to have to go to the store-closet and lock myself in, pretending I had gone after jam, whenever I wanted to read his letters in peace. . . . There's a certain kind of preserve-jar that makes my heart give a little jump yet, because it was just where my eyes lighted —cans like that—when I looked up from reading the loveliest places——"

"I had one like that, that the family didn't like, but I got rid of him," interrupted Janetta coolly. "It was too wearing."

Aunt Janetta seemed a little hurt by her niece's practicality, but she went on justifying herself, a little nervously.

"So we have always said we'd try to make courtship days as easy and happy for other young folks as they were hard for us, in memory of the hard

times we had. And so this May, when little Helen Springer at home came to me crying because her mother wouldn't let her see young George Parsons alone, and asked to borrow my living-room once a week, this wonderful idea came to me. I made up my mind to have the young people here who had no chance to be happy with each other at home. This is such a big old cottage that it has privacy enough for six couples easily."

Aunt Janetta's enthusiasm was mounting so high that, to be frank, she'd quite forgotten she was apologizing. But her niece hadn't. She fixed her big dark eyes on her aunt's gentler blue ones. "Who else beside Miss Springer and Mr. Parsons?" she demanded without comment.

"Alicia Leavett and Arthur Magee," responded her aunt. "*They* really are engaged, dearest, and have *no* place——"

"All right—who else?"

"Diana Johns and Harold Pulsifer. You remember her—Diana? She's trying to make up her mind between Harold and Almer Jackeson, and I want her to take Harold," explained the fairy god-

mother artlessly. "And dear little Kitty Jordan. She's only seventeen, and her mother selects all the men who are allowed to come to see her. The poor child said so piteously, 'Oh, Mrs. Gray, if I could only pick out *one* suitor I shouldn't care *who* he was!'" (Janetta caught her breath, then remembered that "suitor" was merely Southern for what Northern girls call men-friends.) "So I told her to pick out one and I'd see he was asked," Aunt Janetta finished sunnily. "And the others," (she hurried a little here), "are Elinor Dinwiddie and Dick Marsh, and you and a gentleman from California."

Janetta took a long breath, straightened and faced her aunt. She loved Aunt Janetta, but she felt she had to say something.

"As I am not a High School infant whose playmates are still supervised, an entirely nor partially engaged girl, and my family is perfectly courteous about my callers, male and female, will you please tell me what I'm supposed to be doing in this—this dove-cote of yours?" she demanded. "And I want a little information about the gentleman from Cali-

fornia who is paired with me. Won't his mother let him see his friends alone?"

Her aunt's expression became more earnest. But it wasn't an apologetic expression; rather she had the look of one who would break a hard truth gently.

"My dear," she said finally, "it's time you were married."

Janetta, by the flower-twined post, did not move so much as an eyelash; but it was because she was too genuinely surprised. Married—she, twenty-four, one of the handsomest girls in her own sleepy, haughty little town, and the most popular! She—who had refused two men the week before she came away, and one a month before that, and had virtuously discouraged two more before the actual scalping came off, that same spring! She—with an independent income that she had built up for herself out of Grandfather Goldsborough's old lots at the edge of town, and four sisters who had taken her advice about their love-affairs, and adored her! She——!

But one does not voice thoughts like these—they

might sound vain. What Janetta really said, in a voice that was meant to be icy, but was only hurt, was, "I think I'll go home, Aunt Janetta. I shouldn't have gone off and left my work for so long, anyway!" She rose and gathered her hand-bag to her again. It seemed the only landmark left in a mad world. "When is the next train?"

Aunt Janetta lost her pleased poise in a moment. White hands, white hair, white laces all fluttering, she was over and down on the steps by her niece, imploring quite pathetically.

"Oh, but my dear, you must! Why, Janetta, I wouldn't have the heart to have the house-party at all without you! You promised to stay!"

Janetta, who had risen with every intention of going in to pack, halted. Promise-keeping was her pet virtue, and she *had* promised. And . . . after all, it might be fun to watch! Further than watching Janetta swore to herself she would not go, though her aunt wept and prayed.

"But I shall not marry the California person," she said firmly.

"No, dear," said Aunt Janetta meekly. Her niece distrusted her just the same.

But after the house-party had descended in a body that afternoon her heart softened. They all looked just as nice as they could be, and they were all happier than she had ever seen any people before, and when Aunt Janetta whispered to her another request, she found herself, though unwillingly, complying.

She had had time to rest and dress by now, and life seemed less accentuated.

"I want you to tell them all my plans, dear," Aunt Janetta's whisper coaxed, when the group of pretty girls and cheerful men in white was settled on the veranda having iced drinkables and little cakes, the dust of travel all washed away; "it'll sound sweeter coming from a young girl like themselves."

So Janetta, more stately in her yellow crêpe than she realized, rose and spoke to them. Now Janetta looked, her sisters said, like an Indian princess in a fancy picture. To-day she would have given the impartial outsider the impression that she was re-

peating the Indian princess's traditional family curse. Her wide black-velvet eyes looked straight ahead under their level black brows, her red lips were scarcely more vivid than the flush on her olive cheeks.

"I am asked to inform you," she told her aunt's guests steadily, but disguising much less than she imagined the fact that she thought the whole thing very horrid, "that for the fortnight of this house-party you will pair off. Each couple is to select a sitting-room and a place in the gardens, where they will not be disturbed by other couples. Each couple has the use of a canoe, also, and"—Janetta lifted a jeweled heart on a gold chain—"this goes to the first girl actually engaged."

She dropped it as if it were a little too warm for comfort, and sat down. Everybody laughed and clapped, and Janetta felt forlornly serious-minded, and as if there were a magic abroad which didn't enchant her properly; the men and girls sprang up and, laughing, surged around Janetta and her aunt. They bore them down the steps, out to the green-sward, and, at the call of a tall, laughing girl with

yellow braids, the Diana Johns of the undecided heart, they danced about the two in a ring, singing.

It must have been like a scene out of Arcady, the wide lawn of Aunt Janetta's lovely country place, with the ring of dancing, singing young people in their flying white; but Janetta—well, when she heard a street organ playing that tune in Madrid, three years later, there came over her a feeling of sick distaste that she could not account for, till she remembered that that was how she had felt when she last heard the tune, on Aunt Janetta's lawn. It was called "When you play in the game of love," and it was, Janetta told herself, horribly appropriate.

"Come now, children, and choose your sitting-rooms," called Aunt Janetta's soft Southern voice happily, when they released her.

"Sitting-rooms?—court-rooms, you mean!" called back an audacious lad to where she stood in the doorway. They greeted his joke with shouts of laughter, and he struck an attitude on the top step, his hand on his heart.

"I am the plaintiff—a lady has stolen my heart!"

The girl above him, toward whom he was pointing, laughed and ran after Aunt Janetta, followed by the whole fluttering crowd. Janetta came after them more slowly, feeling old and cold and noble and—left out. So left out, indeed, that when little Kitty Jordan asked:

"And which court-room is Miss Janetta going to get?" it was a shock to her. She'd forgotten that she had a part in the game.

"Oh, the library," said her aunt serenely, and she found herself being installed there with much laughing ceremony, and staring across the table at a tall young man with very blue eyes and a cheerful expression. He also looked kind, but this escaped her for the moment.

"Are you my—my——"

"Partner in misery?" supplied the young man cheerfully, with a slight Western accent. They were alone now, the others having swept on down the hall to another of the rooms, and another installation. "I'm exactly that. Honestly, Miss Janetta, it's not my fault. I'm not a native any

more than you are, and the customs of the country don't appeal to me a little bit. . . . Don't shoot, please, because you see I'm down already."

A little ray of hope lighted Janetta's way.

"You mean you don't approve of this——"

"This Valentine party?" he helped her out again. "Well, it's all right for anybody under twenty, but I'm thirty-two, and I should judge you were twenty-four or thereabouts. But we have to play partners for a couple of weeks, and we might as well take it comfortably. That go?"

Janetta looked at him approvingly. Thank heaven for one sane person, even if he did guess her age correctly!

"That goes," she said, and they shook hands gravely across the table. And then, seeing no reason for staying in the house any longer, they went canoeing.

"What made you guess I didn't like the lines the house-party is being run on?" demanded Janetta when they were in midstream.

He grinned.

"Well, I scarcely know. It's just barely possible

that it might have been something in your manner when you gave out the rules of the game."

Janetta blushed, for she did like being polite, and it dawned on her that her manner hadn't been exactly effusive as she did her aunt's bidding. And as she blushed she encountered again the eyes of her partner of the library, the canoe and the garden-place. They were very straight-gazing and blue, with the directness and color of a child's eyes. Janetta tried to remember what little boy of her acquaintance had eyes like that, for they seemed familiar; and finally did remember. It was Dicky Burnes, and Dicky was the most quietly interested, all-absorbing child who ever learned all the damaging facts his elders wished he wouldn't. Nothing escaped those quiet sky-colored eyes of his—or his ears, either.

"I wonder——" thought Janetta.

"Did—did they say you were a business woman, Miss Janetta?" inquired the gentleman with eyes like Dicky's at this moment.

Janetta ceased to wonder if he had a temperament like Dicky's, and knew. He had.

"I don't think they did, but I am," she responded.

"But you're not a bit the kind I thought you'd be," he went on.

Janetta eyed her companion again. He was really almost too much at ease, and abominably unimpressed. Her icy and sexless mood melted somewhat, and she smiled winningly.

"What did you expect?" she inquired.

"Oh, linen collars and eyeglasses and an intellectual gaze," answered her companion, while his blue eyes continued to look quietly into hers.

"Do you know," she said irrelevantly, "I don't think I got your name."

"King," said he. "First names, Garrett Florian. The Florian is something I don't betray to people unless I trust them."

"Thanks," said Janetta.

"Well, as I was saying," went on Garrett Florian King, though he hadn't been saying anything of the sort, "we might as well put it on a sensible basis. We have four weeks of association to put in. Now, I'm at your service outdoors—I think I saw two library tables. I have some work

I might as well get out of the way—how about you?"

"I can get that Martin-Hinkson deal into shape," thought Janetta aloud. "It's a heaven-sent chance to get rid of all that cumbersome, tactful correspondence."

"Good!" said Garrett King. "Ripping day, isn't it?—one of the best days I've seen. And, d'you know, it's not a bad idea, having two sane people in this matrimonial bureau here. Competing for a jeweled heart—Holy Smoke!"

"It's not a matrimonial bureau," defended Janetta hotly for the honor of the house. "It's—it's just Auntie's idea of making people perfectly happy."

"Well, they are, all right," commented Garrett placidly, pulling up to the dock. "And the competition for that heart is going to be strong."

At dinner that night Janetta began to sort out the couples a little more, in her mind. Diana Johns she knew already from her previous visits to her aunt—the girl lived near, a tall, smiling blonde with heavy yellow plaits bound around her head, and

very regular features. Harold Pulsifer, whom Aunt Janetta wished Diana to marry, was a quiet, dark man with something the look of a pleasant black panther; a misleading look, for he proved to be very simple and charming once he was away from Diana, which didn't often happen.

Little Kitty, the seventeen-year-old, on Janetta's other side, had obviously chosen the most decorative "suitor" of her acquaintance, exactly what Janetta herself would have loved at seventeen; crested wavy gold-brown hair, eyelashes that fairly trailed, and almost perfect features. He didn't seem more than twenty-one, so Janetta looked tolerantly at him from a height of age. Kitty herself was a slim, pretty, colorless girl with widely-set blue eyes and a dimple, and ash-blonde hair of the kind that turns brown pretty soon. She was being grown-up to her heart's content in a trained black velvet and high-puffed hair.

Beyond again were the engaged couple, Alicia Leavett and Arthur Magee, rather silent and quite rapturous. Aunt Janetta, pink-and-white and sweetly stately at the end of the long table, caught

Uncle Sylvester's eye at the other end, and directed it to Janetta. She was talking with all her natural gayety and vividness to Garrett King, apparently reconciled. Uncle Sylvester, who had known Janetta some time, lifted an eyebrow.

What Janetta was really saying to Garrett would have chilled her aunt's heart.

"Do you think this Arcady is going to last two weeks without a ripple?" she was demanding.

Garrett looked at her. And as he looked the icy certainty that he was too wise for comfort again surged over Janetta.

"I shouldn't begin starting something for a day or so," he advised in a gentle tone, which might have sounded to their neighbors like a compliment to her eyes. "Give them a little while to be happy and compete for the heart."

"I don't know what you mean," she answered and continued to take her soup. . . .

"How on earth," she was thinking, "does he know so much? . . . I hadn't an idea of starting anything."

Because she had. At home in Bentonburg all

that saved Janetta from being called an incorrigible flirt was people's admiration for her business ability. And as the warmth and the nearness of all these frankly affectionate young people began to act on her tired and too-sensitive nerves, a spirit of mischief which was never very far from the surface in any of the Goldsborough family began to stir. She looked at Garrett King thoughtfully, and rather disliked him for the moment. And she let a silence fall that lasted till the nuts.

There was moonlight, and after dinner everyone melted away, two by two, into the green-and-silver reaches of Arcady, till the only ones left on the veranda were Garrett and Janetta, business partners and guardians of the love-wild. They watched the last couple slip into the shadows together, and smiled at each other understandingly.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Janetta impulsively, "I'm certainly glad you're here!"

"So'm I," said Garrett King without hesitation.

They were pleasurably silent for awhile after that, watching the moon from their veranda chairs.

"It feels like being in a play," said Janetta sud-

denly. "It isn't real at all . . . I'm sure that's a stage moon. Do you know that feeling? . . . I wonder who's the hero, and who the heroine and villain and adventuress are? And what are we, do you think? I'm sure we're something."

"We're the beneficent Providences that come in and straighten everybody out," said Garrett immediately. "Anybody could tell that, just to look at you once. . . . Let's go and settle the cast over where the chairs are better. I see a nice moony spot in the corner, with a hammock and a deck-chair making friends with each other."

"Ugh!" said Janetta. "They're part of Aunt Janetta's stage-setting."

"And I think they are labeled with the names of those whose outdoor trysting-place it is to be," supplemented Garrett cheerfully. "Your aunt is nothing if not thorough."

They were so labeled. By Garrett's pocket flash-light they read:

Janetta Goldsborough.

Garrett King.

Janetta recoiled, but Garrett barred her way.

"Come, Miss Janetta, be a sport," he said. "If we're going to see it through we have to see it through. And I don't think there's anywhere else to sit. Anywhere else we go we'll step on lovers." He held open the hammock.

So she got in. It would have been undignified to make a fuss. Then he draped himself along the deckchair (he was a rather graceful person) and continued to settle the cast.

As Janetta took the tall amber comb out of her piles of velvety-black hair that night she smiled into the glass drowsily.

"There doesn't seem to be much chance of getting to be friends with the girls," she said, "but I believe Garrett's going to be almost as good as having Debby or Angel here. I didn't know a man could be such a comfort. Thank goodness he's an icicle!"

And after finishing her undressing she went happily to sleep.

Next morning after everyone had had a cheerful swim in the swimming-place in the river, the usual melting into the distance automatically began.

"Time," said Garrett, coming up behind her as she gazed out over the lawn, "to seek our secluded nook. Let's go lavish attention on our respective toils." And he led her off with him to the library.

"I feel like a dark impostor, don't you?" he asked her, when they were seated at their tables, and he had produced what he called a pocket typewriter and mounds of yellow paper. What he was doing with them he did not state. "We ought to arrange two wax figures near the window in appropriate attitudes."

It seemed to Janetta that this was altogether too callous a reference to the situation. "Oh, don't!" she protested, wriggling one shoulder.

"All right, I won't," said he, smiling across at her tolerantly. "Now, before I start, can I do or get anything for you?"

"Nothing, thank you," said Janetta, assuming her best Real Estate air.

She liked work, and in a half-hour she had forgotten everything but the necessity of settling the Martin-Hinkson matter to the best advantage. Garrett, after a while, looked across at her, to find

her lost in tragic thought and gnawing the hard end of her fountain pen.

"Anything I can do?" he offered again.

"Nothing," said Janetta decisively and sadly. "There are thirty heirs, at least twenty-nine of them with bad tempers, and they all have to be written to separately and charmingly about the others. A policeman's lot is *not* a happy one."

"I should think not, you poor child!" he said, getting up and coming over by her. "Here, let me write to an heir or so for you—my work can keep."

She shook her head.

"It takes a certain amount of practice. Mrs. Mary Martin has to have her Pom asked after, or she's hurt; and a gentle reference to Adelbert Hinkson's bowling record helps a lot. And so on. It's woman's work."

"Woman's work is never done," said Garrett. "Now," he continued firmly, "you come out with me and play tennis. We've both worked long enough, considering that we both came here in the innocence of our hearts, intending to loaf."

Janetta rose obediently. She had been hunger-

ing for tennis and John's excellent service. And work did seem a mistake this weather. She eyed Garrett King's piles of paper as she passed them. She had an intense desire to know what his work was.

"Can your work wait too?" she asked politely.

"It can," said Garrett, telling her nothing of what it was. "It's awfully well-trained work."

So they passed out into the lively spring weather, and played vigorous tennis till luncheon, which was, like all Aunt Janetta's meals, very good.

"Life at Heart-Throb House isn't bad—what?" inquired Garrett as they parted to straighten up for luncheon.

And Janetta was forced to admit that it wasn't. But she didn't say so aloud.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THINGS went on at Heart-Throb House—to use Garrett's very felicitous name for it—for some days after that, without much incident. Janetta worked with Garrett in the mornings, wondering very much what he was doing, but too proud to inquire. In the afternoons and evenings they did, with a difference, very much what the rest did. It was a happy and Arcadian time.

"Oh, it's Fairyland or Arden!" sighed Janetta happily to Garrett the fifth night of their stay.

"Nearly," he said with a certain gravity.

She laughed and moved away from him, for they were dancing that simple measure called "Paul Jones," which Aunt Janetta had instituted so that the various partners shouldn't dance with each other *all* the time.

At the end of the dance she slipped quietly away, out on the porch, for a too-gay foot had gone through her flounce, and she loved that particular

green dance-frock like a sister. She made her way to a big palm at the side, so that she could slip behind it and pin herself together. But the palm was tenanted already. Little Kitty Jordan was coiled up behind it, sobbing as if her heart would break, with her ash-blonde hair loosened from its unaccustomed height and tangled about her face.

Janetta put an arm impulsively around her, as if she had been one of her own younger sisters.

"Why, you poor dear kitten," she said, "who's been doing things to you? Tell Janetta!"

"Oh, *dear!*" said Kitty between her sobs, "I'm so glad it's you—I am so glad it's you—I was afraid it would be one of the other girls!"

"I'm very glad, too, if you are," Janetta murmured soothingly. "Now tell me about it. Can't I do something?"

"Oh, it's all right for you," sobbed Kitty irrelevantly, "you're so tall and stately and lovely and happy and sort of above things, and you and Mr. King are just like married folks; you stay together all the time quietly as if you liked it, but you *trust* each other. . . . You don't ever seem to feel as

if Mr. King might stop loving you and go away to other people, do you? You're both so *faithful!* You can't understand how—how I fe-eel."

Janetta, in the dark, turned scarlet. But never mind that—the business in hand was straightening poor Kitty out.

"No, dear," she said gently, "I can't. But if Mr. King did talk to other girls I wouldn't mind one bit, and you mustn't mind if Erskine does."

"It's that hateful Diana Johns!" sobbed Kitty. "She keeps taking him and *taking* him——"

"But she doesn't want him really," said Janetta with what was a very firm conviction.

This did not soothe Kitty much either, but finally Janetta did pull her together a little, and take her in to wash her face and try to look happy again. Then Janetta herself collected Erskine the beautiful but faithless from under Diana's very paw, and took him back to Kitty. After that she sought Garrett King. Seeking Garrett when she wanted good advice was becoming more of a habit with her than she realized.

"And what shall we do?" she asked when she had come to the end of the whole sad story.

"Nothing," said Garrett promptly. "That's all we *can* do. You know that quotation about the course of true love—well, it's so. If she *would* bring as pretty a boy-doll as that with her, she's got to expect to have competition—second prize, by Jove!" He began to laugh. "First prize, one jeweled heart—second prize, Master Erskine Kincaid!"

"I think you're brutal," said Janetta petulantly, half-laughing in spite of herself.

"'Course. Regular primordial brute, whatever that is," said Garrett unruffled. Indeed, he smiled at her as if he were rather pleased at her remark. "We're missing most of this fox-trot, and it's the best thing I do. . . . Besides, Diana Johns isn't the Perfect Vampire by any means," he added as they trotted down the floor.

"How do you know?" demanded Janetta.

"I found her crying behind that identical palm myself last night," he explained.

"What?" exclaimed Janetta sceptically, glancing

over to where the lady in question, now in possession of her rightful prey, Harold Pulsifer, was laughing almost wildly.

"Crying very hard," said he, backing Janetta down the room. Janetta looked thoughtfully at Diana Johns. She had a brunette's instinctive distrust of pronounced blondes, a distrust which her own perfectly trustworthy yellow-haired sister had only removed as far as she herself was concerned. Diana Johns, she remembered her aunt saying, had been trying to make up her mind between Harold Pulsifer, now present, and an Almer Jackeson who was not here. And Diana was, according to all the proof, not perfectly satisfied and happy—or why was she driven to amusing herself by taking poor little Kitty's boy-doll? Janetta did not think, from what she remembered of her own slight acquaintance with Diana, that the girl was a habitual man-stealer. Pulsifer was amiable, and very well-off. The absent man according to all accounts was high-tempered and poor. Diana must have made her decision, or she would not be here. Janetta thought hard till the dance was done.

That was the first ripple on the placidity.

The second was due to Janetta's own wickedness of heart. The truth was—an indefensible truth—the sight of all these devoted men got on her nerves. The other girls had lovers—all *she* had was a kind friend and partner. Whereas, back at home, humdrum home where there was much work to do——

"Heaven helps those who help themselves," said Janetta contemplatively next morning. She said it aloud, by mistake.

Garrett, across the room, lifted his head from his eternal yellow sheets, lined and interlined.

"It depends on what you're thinking of helping yourself to," he suggested. "Sometimes Heaven hasn't a thing to do with it."

Janetta looked at him almost terrifiedly. It was not the first time it had occurred to her that he was too intelligent to be altogether a comfort or pleasure. Nevertheless:

"I don't see why it would hurt me to have a little harmless Platonic society," she went on thinking, *not* aloud this time. ". . . And if Arthur Magee is thoroughly engaged he'll merely be dream-

ily kind to me, on account of its being a beautiful lovelit world that I inhabit as well as his fiancée. . . . M'mm, and black slippers would be better with that dress and no necklace or jewelry at all. . . ."

She went on with the Martin-Hinkson deal, humming soft little songs to herself over its multifarious letters.

It should be said for her that when she devoted her evening to Arthur Magee, the betrothed of Alicia Leavitt, she honestly didn't know anything was loaded. But it was. Janetta was so different from the other pretty, provincial girls in their more or less home-made frocks, and their manners all on one pattern, that she was more interesting than she knew. She had been so silent and stately and aloof that Arthur Magee could scarcely believe his eyes and ears when she began to act generally as if she liked him very much. So (in order, as he tried to explain afterward, to see what she really *was* like) he responded alertly. (He was a very nice-looking man, with curly hair.) Then he responded some more. After dinner, with a you-understand look

at Garrett, and a wave of the hand which ordered him to look after Arthur's lady-love, Janetta disappeared into the distance with Arthur, and their canoe was the last-but-two in. The last-but-one held Alicia Leavett and Garrett, she white and quiet, he exactly as usual. The last—well, that, I am sorry to say, held Diana Johns and Kitty's boy with the eyelashes. The canoe which had been tied to the dock all the evening was the one which should have held Kitty and Harold Pulsifer (supposed to be courting Diana); but Kitty was in her bedroom crying, and Harold was out calling on a house-party of professional Bostonians a mile away. The Bostonians, they said afterward, found him charming, but a little grave.

Janetta and Garrett worked on in silent amity next day till about eleven. Then Garrett spoke.

"What are you trying to do, Jan?" he asked. "Shuffle the whole pack? If you and the Johns girl keep on man-eating, this is going to be a far from happy home."

"Man-eating?" inquired Janetta joyously. She was dressed in a little white middy suit, with scarlet

bows at her hair and the opening of her collar. Her stockings were scarlet, too, and her lips and cheeks were a velvety scarlet. She looked like a tall girl of about fourteen, and much more alive and *much* more innocent than usual. "Oh, do you think I am? I'm so glad! I was so lonesome —I thought nobody would ever love me any more."

"Oh, don't worry," answered Garrett exasperatedly, "they will!"

"It's nice to have people like you," observed Janetta meekly, slipping another sheet into her typewriter, with her black lashes on her cheeks.

"If you keep on," Garrett warned her, "you'll get cast for the Adventuress in the play of Who Got the Jeweled Heart."

Janetta looked at him wistfully and he relented.

"All right, maybe I—maybe you won't," he amended swiftly.

"Now, what does he mean by that?" wondered Janetta, as she pointed out aloud that Diana Johns, the inscrutable, was shuffling the pack more than anybody else.

"I suppose so," said he a little dispiritedly, and put his papers together and went out. Janetta went too, soon after, feeling as if she'd somehow hurt his feelings, and wanting to make up for it. But when she found him he was about to go golfing with Diana. So Janetta gathered about her not only Arthur Magee but two other men who should have waited devotedly for their ladies to rise. She took them down to the village with her, she *said* to help her choose postage-stamps. There must have been a large selection, for they lunched downtown at the inn, and never got back at all until dinner time, when they fled to their rooms to dress.

At dinner everyone was a little wildly gay, and when Diana, scarlet-cheeked, proposed that they should all change partners after every course, it was acceded to loudly. Janetta, moving further and further from Garrett's poised cheerfulness and steady friendliness, felt curiously lost. She had grown very used to him. But she was none the less one of the leaders of the gayety, and at intervals she and Diana glanced across at one another and laughed.

Next morning she looked at Garrett defiantly, when they met at work.

"Heaven will protect the working-girl," she said, though he hadn't spoken a word. "Go on playing with your yellow paper."

"Others beside Heaven," observed Garrett crossly, "seem to be willing." He went on with his yellow paper as he spoke.

It occurred to Janetta that there were disadvantages to having a man for your sister, comrade and friend. If he'd been Angela, Janetta would have run over and put her arm around him and shaken him a little, then sat down on his manuscript and had it out. As he wasn't, she only looked wistfully at the shiny new pamphlet on "The Future of Bentonburg" that she'd just had page proofs of, and wished she could throw it at him. She kept on with her course of action.

So did Diana Johns. By the time three more days had passed the house-party had almost ceased to go about in pairs. It didn't dare, Garrett said.

It was still later than this that the blow fell.

"What have they done to you, Garrett?" Jan-

etta asked as he entered their workroom on a sunny Thursday.

"Nothing whatever," said he.

"Something's the matter," she said firmly. "I haven't spent the last week with you, twelve hours a day steady and no time off for good behavior, without knowing when you're worried. Tell me now, that's a good boy."

Garrett yielded immediately. It may have been that this tacit burying of the hatchet was pleasant to him.

"Nobody can find Diana Johns," he said slowly.

"Diana!" gasped Janetta. "Anybody else?"

"That's the queer part of it," he replied. "Nobody else. All present and accounted for. Pulsifer just came back from visiting his Boston friends down the pike, with a book under his arm called 'The Psychology of the Unconscious.' He's that, all right. Nobody's dared tell him so far."

Janetta came over to him and laid one hand on his arm. She looked at him gravely.

"Garrett, we have to go after that girl," she said. "Think how poor little romantic Aunt Janetta

would feel if her wonderful Valentine house-party was wrecked by somebody eloping—and actually *eloping alone!*"

Garrett looked down at her.

"I'll go if you say so," he answered. "I owe your aunt anything I can do, I think."

She did not stop to discover what he meant. They parted hurriedly to dress for traveling, and commandeered the luggage-Ford in the far garage to get them to the train.

"She'll have to wait at the junction for a northbound train," Garrett said as they sped to the station. He frowned down at the steering-wheel. "I suppose we ought to be keeping our hands off, after all. Diana is old enough and big enough to run away from a house-party without being brought back as if she were an escaped animal."

"Oh, but, after you and I have played it out all this time just to keep the house-party what it is, I do think Diana needn't have done this!" Janetta exclaimed indignantly, her clan spirit rising. "She was having a pleasant enough time, as far as I can see!"

"You may notice that I'm not turning around," he said. "We'll at least try to induce the prodigal to come back."

They made record time to the station, and caught the ten-forty-five, a train beyond their dreams.

They did not talk much as they sat together in the uncomfortable red plush of the day-coach. Garrett got papers, and with a gentle, "Now don't think about it any more than you can help," buried himself in one.

He laid it down presently, at a sound he did not understand. He turned and looked—and Janetta, the gay, the poised, the capable—was sobbing softly into her inadequate handkerchief.

"Here, take mine," said Garrett hastily. "Oh, Janetta, Jan dear, please don't cry. It will be all right. What do you care about Diana Johns—Janetta, you'll break my heart!"

Janetta took his handkerchief, clinging a little furtively to the strong fingers that offered it.

"It—it isn't Diana," she said, controlling herself with an effort. "It's I. I've been very wicked. I should have really helped things go right, the

way you did, not been a horrid Diana-person myself! Why you—you know you *said* I ate men!"

It was lonely in the day-coach, and Garrett and Janetta had been very close to each other in the long pleasant days of more than a week. He put his arm around her for a second, and it felt very heavenly-comforting and happy.

"You poor baby! You never ate one!" he said. "They just came your way and asked to be bitten. Don't cry, dear!"

Janetta knew this to be a generous over-statement that Garrett's cooler mind would never have accepted, but she liked it just the same.

"But I'm wicked!" she said again.

At that Garrett burst out unexpectedly.

"Wicked!" he said. "You think you've done wrong, and you've been a perfect angel—and I've been doing something myself every minute I've been here that will make you hate me when I tell you. And I've got to tell you, before I tell you anything else."

"I couldn't hate you," said Janetta. "You're—

why you're the only reality in this whole whirling extravaganza."

He spoke on, without noticing what she said, except to take her hand and hold it, as if he needed something to hold to.

"I'm not the Garrett King your aunt thought she was asking to this house-party. I'm his cousin, nothing like as well-off. I write plays."

Janetta looked at him in recollection, suddenly.

"Why—Florian King?" she said. "'*The Red Flower,*' and '*The Light of Their Road*'?"

He nodded.

"Garry—they call us Garry and Florry, I'm sorry to say—told me about this, and how he'd been asked because his mother's third cousin had a real-estate-managing niece that she thought ought to marry him. Your aunt told my aunt Lilian all about her dear little Arcadian plans—bless her heart!—and Garry and I thought it was the biggest lark out, and I scented a situation. So I told Garry I'd take his job, and do a play out of it if it was the last thing in life. (I *knew* you'd hate me.) But when I found out what an angel your aunt was,

and what a splendid girl you were I felt like a dog —like a whole kennel-full of yellow pups. And I—well, I liked you so much I couldn't get out, as I should have to be decent. And I got to work at the play to keep myself from thinking too much about you, being too crazy over you. But I never meant to use it, not after the first day. When it's finished I'm going to burn it."

"Is—is it a good play?" murmured Janetta at random.

"Yes, it is," said Garrett a little sadly. "Oh, Janetta, when you're back home, out of this infernal Valentine, and we've rescued Diana, won't you try to forgive me? I know I haven't played the game——"

Janetta put her own hand back into his quite frankly and gently. Gone were all her visions of being a real-estate magnate. Gone was all her scorn of people who let propinquity mate them. Gone was even her scorn of Aunt Janetta. But Janetta Goldsborough was herself to the end—straightforward and honest, with her cards on the table.

"That was the reason I worked so hard on the Martin-Hinksons," she said, looking straight at him. "Garrett, I don't care who you are or what you did. . . . Oh, there were times when I just had to hold myself tight to keep from coming and sitting on the arm of your chair and——"

"Oh, Janetta, you angel!" he said.

The day-coach was still mercifully empty. So he kissed her.

They didn't find Diana at the junction, because Almer Jackeson (for it was indeed he) had met her with his motor, and they were being married just about the time Garrett and Janetta arrived at the end of their journey. They had thoughtfully left a note explaining this to possible pursuers. So Garrett and Janetta went back to the house-party. It was all there was to do.

Aunt Janetta, beaming in spite of herself, met them.

"Diana's married to Almer Jackeson!" she told them gayly. "She telephoned. Oh, children, isn't it *lovely* to think they're so happy? . . . And, my

dears, what have you been doing—not getting married, too?"

Garrett looked at Janetta to see if she would be embarrassed. But Janetta had never been more content with life.

"Not as bad as that," she smiled. "But—Auntie, you offered a jeweled heart to the first girl engaged. May I have it, please?"

"Just like a girl!" said John disgustedly, when Janetta, bringing (as Isabella said) her sheaves with her, came back home. Garrett stopped over on his way out west to be shown to the family—which shows the extent of his affection for Janetta. "And I thought we'd agreed that neither of us was going to bother with getting married till we'd made a lot of money and got all there was out of life! Well, *I* don't intend to be silly."

Janetta only smiled at him in a superior fashion. "I don't intend to stop getting all there is out of life. In fact, this is the way to get it," she told him unblushingly.

"Not for me," said John sadly, and shook his head.

But when the hour of John's downfall came, it wasn't even a love-affair that struck him down. . . . It was what Isabella explained as his mother-heart.

CHAPTER NINE

THEY never could understand it. It wasn't as if John hadn't plenty of relations to be kind to, right in the house with him. As Isabella said, if John felt that he couldn't be happy without being a mother to somebody, why there were Angela and Isabella herself, not to speak of his brothers. There were also all the pets that he had brought in from time to time. John had started at four with a kitten, and as time passed had worked through the animal kingdom faithfully—white mice, white rats, guinea-pigs, pigeons, rabbits, dogs, and ever and always cats.

After all, when you came to think of it, a baby was the logical sequence. At any rate, there it was. John Goldsborough, at the age of twenty-four, made up his mind that he was going to adopt a baby.

Of course, as far as expense went, in a family the size of the Goldsboroughs, a baby would be as negligible as one of the cats. Most of the girls and

boys were earning very decent amounts of money. John, in particular, was getting a salary that would have been considered an Income a generation earlier.

It was at supper one placid, honeysuckle-scented June night after Janetta's return that John dropped his bomb into a comparatively peaceful family circle.

"I don't see why we don't adopt a baby," said he, gazing over Annice's brown head into the garden that was to be seen through a window behind her. "We need young life in this house."

"Young life!" gasped Isabella, aged sixteen. "Well, thanks *awfully!* What do you call me?"

"Oh, I don't mean that sort of thing," answered John offhandedly, the way you do to your sister. "I mean a nice happy little kid about two that would run to meet you at night——"

He was checked by howls of mirth from most of his brothers and sisters.

"Reel two, scene one: Little angel toddler greeting its adopted parent!" declaimed Isabella, visibly gloating. "Scene two—Little angel toddler bothers

adopted parent when he wants to do something else. Adopted parent barks crossly, 'Mother, Belle, Angel, somebody, take away this darn kid! I don't see why you insisted on having her, anyway!'"

There was enough truth in this picture to waken John's family to renewed mirth.

"You'd have to learn to sew, Jack!" his younger brother Sandy reminded him with unholy glee.

"And be a loving parent to it," added Janetta. "Never lose your temper—never be cross at late meals—think what a bad example that would be. Let's have it, mother!"

Janetta tipped her queenly head back in joy at her own visions, and her eyes gleamed with amusement.

"Nonsense!" said the unmoved John. "There are enough women in this house to look after one little baby, I should think."

An outcry answered him.

"Angela is busy every minute with her pupils, and does too much around the house, anyway," his mother summed up when it died down. "And Annice and Belle are busy enough with the house, not

counting Annice's trousseau. You know, John, it's a big house and a big family, and we have only old Grace. We never can depend on that second maid."

Stately Janetta, who had nine-to-five hours like any male being, and was therefore out of it, ended decisively:

"There isn't one inch of room for another person to look after in this family. John, you're good-looking and at times you seem intelligent, but of all the crazy ideas you ever brought home this is the craziest! The baby alligator was *nothing* to it!"

"You got attached to that alligator, you know you did, Jan," John defended himself. "Everybody was crazy over it. Why, when Carrie Chapman got it out of its box and did something to it that made it never want to eat again, we all felt terribly. It wasn't I that burst into tears when Carrie dug——"

But here John's gruesome recollections were checked by his father, just as Carrie Chapman, the long yellow family cat, heard her name and came to claw his trouser affectionately for scraps.

"Alligators," said Worrell, the second brother, who was a hard-working and literal-minded youth with bone glasses that nearly prevented him from being good-looking, "are one thing. Babies are another. We'd always be stepping on it. I do on cats anyway. You don't know what it is to be near-sighted."

Worrell had been steadily in love with one girl ever since he was twenty, and was not interested in anything else outside the family.

"You're getting off the subject," said John obstinately. He wasn't at all convinced. He still felt that a nice female infant about two was all his family needed to make it perfection.

"Training it to run and greet you evenings would be an extra bother," offered Isabella cheerfully. "I'll do it for you on a cash basis, Jack."

"Train her not to bite strangers," advised Sandy frivolously.

John was still unmoved.

"We need young life," said he and strode off to an after-dinner tennis game with his special sister, Janetta. Echoes of the fray could still be heard

from afar as they disappeared down the hall and began digging under the hall-rack for tennis-shoes.

"*Well!*" said Mrs. Goldsborough.

"A little toddling blue-eyed angel!" said Isabella, and they all laughed again. It was unquestionably a very good joke.

That, indeed, was the trouble. If the Goldsboroughs had been intelligent enough to keep that joke in the home circle, it would have continued to be a delightful and durable bit of humor, nothing more. But they weren't.

Annice dimpled over it to her fiancé, Arnold Salter, and her godmother-in-law-elect, Mrs. Molineaux, which did no harm, because Arnold was a silent person, and Mrs. Molineaux chuckled over it a little, then correctly dismissed it from her mind as something amusing but unimportant. Janetta put it in a letter that went west to a young man with very blue eyes, but he almost skipped it for the more satisfactory paragraph below about how much he was missed. So far no harm was done.

It was Isabella, sixteen and still unfettered, who, as she gracefully phrased it, spilled the beans. Poor

child, it was scarcely her fault, and she told her disapproving family afterward that she was more to be pitied than scorned. None of the other girls being available, she'd had to go rebelliously down and amuse Mrs. Grayson till her mother could dress and appear.

Now Mrs. Grayson was as sweet as possible, but a sense of humor, which is knowing funny things from serious ones when you hear them, she hadn't. And after Isabella had asked after her health and all her family's there was a pause which Isabella filled with information about her kittens. Mrs. Grayson had cat-fear, so that, too, proved a blind alley. In desperation Isabella offered another piece of information.

"John says he wants to adopt a baby," she said.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Grayson gaspingly. "Oh!" she repeated, and got her breath this time.

Mrs. Grayson belonged to a Sunshine Society and a Pollyanna Club and a Hopeful Thoughts Circle.

"How beautiful!" she responded gallantly. "What a wonderful fatherhood thought for one so

young! How soon does he think of taking the darling little thing?"

Isabella, who had not intended the thought to be considered wonderful, but merely amusing, tried to undo her work, with the usual results.

"Oh, he hasn't really picked one out yet. She has to be well-born and pretty and affectionate and intelligent and two," she offered hastily, "it may take some time."

"Rest assured that I shall help him!" beamed Mrs. Grayson, patting Isabella with a plump white glove. "*So* beautiful!"

At this point Mrs. Goldsborough came in and Isabella ran, panic-stricken. She knew Mrs. Grayson's relentless helping hand of old. But she hoped against hope, telling nobody what had passed, that the lady would forget, or that the specifications were too difficult.

"Mother," she suggested that afternoon later, waylaying Mrs. Goldsborough on the stairs, "if—if anybody should take John's baby seriously and offer to get him one, would you tell him about it?"

Her mother, who was balancing a pile of ironed

sheets, braced one knee to steady her load, and said reluctantly, "I suppose it would be only right, dear!"

Isabella supposed nothing of the sort, but she mentally went over those of her family who would have scruples over suppressing information about babies, and those who wouldn't.

"Old Nan's trying so hard to be worthy of a good man's love that she's hopeless," she decided in her lawless young mind. "Jan's still almost human, but I don't know. Sandy's all right, and Worrell. Angela—well, I don't know. I'd better answer the telephone myself after this."

Finally her fears became so strong that she gave up trying to guess for herself how far her brothers and sisters could be trusted, and threw herself on their collective mercy. They responded gallantly; not even conscientious Annice, or dogmatic Worrell, dreamed of doing anything but vowing to conceal offered babies from John. In fact, after Mrs. Grayson's offer, the family skirted any approach to the topic nervously, and Cousin Laura Dusenbury's third baby's birthday cards nearly created

a panic until Angela resourcefully dropped them down the Pekin vase.

But their schemes were of no avail, for it was just at mealtime that Mrs. Grayson called John up, and John's seat at table was nearest the telephone, giving him a great advantage over the rest in the usual footrace toward the ringing bell.

"Yes,—How do you do, Mrs. Grayson?" they heard him say—and then silence.

"It's all over," Annice said awedly. The family, deathly silent, with moveless or downlaid knives and forks, listened on. There were more silences, and then yeses from John—yeses of mounting enthusiasm. Then another long silence and a howl of joy, and a hasty thank-you-good-by: and John bounded back to his seat with rapture written on every feature.

"She's found us a kid!" he rejoiced. "What do you think of that for luck? Everything we want—blue eyes, affectionate disposition, good family, except that the father ran off, twenty-two months old, talks a little and walks a lot——"

He stopped, out of breath, waiting for congratu-

lations, but his family was cold. Even Janetta, who had feigned loyal enthusiasms in their day for the mice, the rabbits, the guinea-pigs, the baby-'gator and the greyhounds, said only: "Mother, may I have the saltines?"

John looked hurt.

"I thought you'd *like* it!" said he sadly. "I don't believe one of you girls really has a mother-heart!"

His only answer was heartless laughter. The Goldsboroughs never wanted more than an excuse to be amused, anyway.

"John, dear," explained Angela finally, drying her azure-blue eyes delicately, "the trouble is, you have the only mother-heart in the family. There was a mistake somewhere."

John ignored this serenely.

"She's coming to-morrow," said he.

The shriek that went up was not of laughter this time; it was consternation. But it was nothing to John.

"To-morrow night," he repeated ruthlessly. "Her mother's bringing her over."

Which her mother duly did.

"We'll try her for a while, if her mother really has no other place for her but the asylum," said the Goldsboroughs to each other weakly as the morning of the day they expected her went on. They all knew well as they said it that if John really wanted the baby to stay she would, for John was a spoiled boy in that household.

The baby did not arrive until long after they expected her, and at a much later hour than babies should be kept awake. The girls, massed excitedly in their mother's bedroom, listened for hours for the door-bell. When it did ring it was only a caller for Angela, who had to be told to come the next night, and then a package from Bailey, Banks and Biddle for Annice.

"I don't believe they'll bring her at all," Angela whispered to Annice after the last disappointment. These two had, with their mother, been chosen the baby's reception committee, because they were less given to expressing their opinions than the rest, and John therefore supposed they hadn't so many.

Annice's little oval face expressed no such hope.

"Things like that *happen*," she replied with dark conviction.

"At ten at night?" Angela inquired with mild scorn.

But even as she spoke the bell rang again, and Isabella, hanging over the stairs, saw a tall, drooping woman and a very small child in an orange corduroy coat being ushered into the parlor by old Grace.

"It's come!" hissed Isabella; and the reception committee went down the front stairs to greet it, while the unofficial rest of the family cascaded down the back stairs and gained the back parlor, where they lurked behind the portières, squeaking with excitement.

Nobody could have been anything but sorry for the tiny, orange-clad baby, whose name proved to be Althea Le Mare. She was a forlorn white thing, frightened to the point of noiselessness and pathetically docile. Angela had her on her lap in a moment, and then she and Annice took her into a corner, where they fed her graham crackers and milk until she was less terror-stricken, and actually

smiled. Meanwhile John and his mother remained to negotiate with Althea's mother, who was pallid and haughty, and talked—how that woman talked! By gradual degrees the Goldsboroughs massed behind the portières wearied of listening and melted away. Isabella, faithful to the last, got herself a sofa-pillow and lay down on the floor where she could rest while she heard. So her sisters nearly fell over her when they came through, finally, bearing little Althea away to a bath and bed.

"She isn't interesting," said Angela reluctantly of the mother, "but I suppose a grief like that——"

"I know why he left her," said Isabella without ruth, tilting on the edge of the bathtub. "It was self-preservation. He knew if he didn't he'd be talked to death."

"Oh, Isabella!" reproached Annice, busy with a wash-cloth at the back of the baby's neck. "(Angel, I don't believe this poor lamb *ever* had a bath before!) Belle, you listened!"

"I did indeed," replied Isabella calmly, "and I ought to have a medal for it."

"Go get a nightgown out of the place Mother

keeps our baby-things," ordered Angela hastily. You couldn't crush Isabella, but you could deflect her.

"Is John going to legally adopt it right away?" Isabella asked when she came back with the night-gown.

"Not for six months. But Mrs. Le Mare gave him her word he should have her at the end of that time—all rights."

"Option—I see," said Isabella. "Well, she won't be bad when she's fattened. I'm going to make her a little white slip."

"Little precious!" said Angela, kissing the baby, who kissed her back willingly, and carrying her to the crib prepared for her in their mother's and father's room.

CHAPTER TEN

As time went on the baby Althea fitted delightfully into the Goldsborough household. They loved her and she loved them without reservation. Her hair, coaxed the wrong way by every damp brush in the girls' rooms, reached into little ringlets. Her pale little face filled out with Mrs. Goldsborough's practised hand directing her diet. Her cheeks turned faintly pink and developed adorable dimples. As for affection and merriment and cheerfulness and cleverness, she couldn't have suited better if she had been made on purpose. She even developed an especial devotion to John, and ran to meet him at night with cries of delight and demands on his pockets. When he lifted her to his broad shoulder and carried her into the dining-room of evenings, her tiny hands clutching joyfully at his curly hair and her little rosy cheek pressed to his handsome young face, they looked like a picture of an ideal young father and baby daughter.

"You couldn't tell them from a chromo in the Christmas Graphic," Isabella said scornfully, furtively feeding Althea jam, however, as she spoke.

Oh, Althea was the dearest baby that ever lived, unquestionably, and the family's first insistence on her short stay faded imperceptibly into a placid acceptance of her as a life member.

They did not accept her mother quite so willingly. Mrs. Le Mare had given the impression that, her child once deposited where she would be taken care of, she was going in search of the several sorts of employment she said awaited her. And unquestionably when Mrs. Grayson, charitable soul that she was, found her for the Goldsboroughs, she had told that lady that she wanted to put the baby in an asylum, because otherwise she would not be free for a Career. But she seemed to be less interested in the Career than they had thought.

"Does she think we want to adopt her too?" demanded Isabella fiercely, not for the first time. She leaned against her favorite porch pillar on a perfect July evening and looked down at John, smoking in a porch-rocker.

John, who seemed to feel that as the baby's sponsor he was in honor bound to stand up for the relatives, sighed. He looked so discontentedly picturesque, there with his head tipped back against the willow rocker, that even Isabella's heart was touched. She came over and sat down on the broad chair-arm, and patted him.

"Never mind, Jacky," she consoled. "Maybe her dear Boy that she talks about will really want her back some time soon. She's always saying so."

"No such luck," replied John. "Besides, if he did I suppose they'd want Althea to complete the home."

"They can't,—she promised," said Isabella. "I never knew anybody to talk so much in my life. And she never smiles, and she never listens to a word anybody else says, unless you admire Althea, and then she acts as if it were a personal compliment. And she practically boards here."

John sighed again. It was very true. You never knew when Mrs. Le Mare, breathing gloom, mightn't descend on their light-hearted household and stay from two hours to a day.

"What's the matter?" inquired Janetta, sweeping out of the house and sitting down on a step below the one Sandy and Annice, who were playing Canfield silently, occupied.

"Mrs. Le Mare," explained Isabella briefly. It was all they needed. The floodgates opened.

"She comes into the library," said Annice, looking up from her cards, "and begins telling Arnold how Boy always loved her, and just ran away and left her in——"

"In a thoughtless moment," finished Angela bitterly: Angela's tête-à-têtes had also been interrupted. "*I* know."

"And she talks about the folly of getting married," went on Annice, "till I feel as if the wedding ceremony would turn poor Arnold into a dreadful monster with horns and hoofs. And it can't!" she concluded passionately. "He's—he's the dearest—why, he's even polite to *her!*"

Isabella picked up Althea suddenly from where the child was playing with her blocks on the floor, dropped her into John's lap and kissed her.

"Darling, tell John that he adopted you and you

alone, and it's time he parted violently with your mother!" said she. "John, can't you *say* anything?"

John looked uncomfortable but dogged.

"I've done the best I could," he said. "I spoke to her about it yesterday, and she seemed awfully upset. She talked for two hours about her wounded feelings—not cross, just keeping on, you know, a sort of keening—and then she cried."

"She isn't coming to-night, anyhow," Annice interposed again, looking up cheeringly. "She said there was a very special reception at Mrs. Grayson's that she felt it her duty not to miss."

Janetta bristled.

"The one mother stayed home from because she was so tired out, staying awake with Althea's throat!" she said. "I do think——"

"Here's somebody coming," interrupted Sandy. "Shut up, Jan—it's an awfully pretty girl."

The Goldsboroughs ceased their indignation meeting, and waited for the girl to come down the path, Annice and Sandy politely clearing a fairway on the steps.

The newcomer's face had an expression of surprise, as if she had not expected to see so many people, or such presentable ones. She put back her blue-serge shoulders and came gallantly on up the steps, looking about her. She was a little thing, severely tailored on this hot July evening, with an incongruously childish face. She looked, as John remarked afterward, like a pocket Madonna with a Bryn Mawr degree.

"Does Mrs. Goldsborough live here?" she asked.

Angela the eldest, took charge of the situation. Rising from her hammock beyond John, she came forward and smiled at the stranger—Angela, smiling, was the most charming of persons.

"This is her home, but she's lying down just now," she explained. "I'm her eldest daughter. Wouldn't I do?"

"I—I hardly think so," said the little stranger, setting a very firm mouth and obviously trying not to fall under the Goldsborough charm. "I came here to deliver a message from Mrs. Le Mare."

"The villain still pursues us!" said Isabella under her breath.

"Oh, then it's my brother you want to talk to," Angela replied with relief. "John——"

John woke up with a start from a sort of trance he had gone into: a trance wherein he had concentrated on the small intruder. He rose, with Althea delightedly clinging around his neck, and said that he would be glad to do anything he could for——

"My name is Landon, Carolyn Landon, and I'm a kindergarten teacher," she explained. "I'm a perfectly responsible person, I have letters——"

"I'm sure you are," said John fervently. "Won't you—won't you sit down?"

"No, thank you," said she. "Is this Mrs. Le Mare's little girl?"

"This is Althea—but she belongs to me now, don't you, Kiddy?" said John, shifting the little girl to a seat on his arm. "Whose little girl are you?"

"John's girl!" said Althea happily, hugging him as she spoke. She was beginning to talk quite well.

"I have a letter from Mrs. Le Mare," said Miss Landon.

"Really, you'd better sit down," protested John,

while the family watched the scene with deep interest.

She did, reluctantly, handing him the letter. He read it carefully, and then said "Great Scott!" and then read it again. Isabella dropped all pretense of being in the background.

"What does she say—let me see!" she demanded, and John silently handed the letter over to the bevy of sisters, who read it in a body.

"I have decided," said Mrs. Le Mare's flowing hand, "that it is best for my little one's interests to live elsewhere than with you. Will you please give her to the bearer of this note, my dear friend Miss Landon."

"But she promised!" cried out honest Isabella.

"Angel," said John, "won't you take the girls away? I think Miss Landon and I had better talk this over alone."

Angela did as she was told. She swept the porch of her sisters, and Sandy left, too, at a gesture of his brother's.

John looked shocked.

"I don't understand it a bit," he said. "Mrs.

Le Mare gave us the child for adoption. She's happy here and we want her. Why is she passing her on to you?"

"She said," explained the little kindergartner, wavering, "that it wasn't a desirable environment. And I wanted a little girl to bring up, to adopt myself. I don't expect to marry, and I want to work out an improvement of Montessori."

She looked very small and alone among the porchful of tall girls and men, but entirely indomitable. You could see that she had ideals and that she would die for them any day. John noticed again how blue her eyes were; not sky-blue like Angela's, but deep-blue and unwavering and very trustful looking. But her mouth was firm. And her errand steeled John against her for the moment.

"Experiment on poor little Thea!" he exclaimed, tightening his arm around the child.

"I want her, too. I'd be good to her," said Carolyn Landon, lifting her very sweet and very determined little face to tall John.

"And you think we aren't desirable?" said he, smiling a little. It was so funny, he couldn't help it.

"I—I didn't get quite the idea of you I have now," Carolyn Landon acknowledged directly. "You—you seem kind to her, all of you."

Isabella, at a discreet distance, her fox-like ears at highest tension, tried to suppress a shriek of laughter. It was too funny—the Goldsboroughs of Carolina and Philadelphia, pedigreed and well-mannered to the bone, approached meekly by newcomers to Bentonburg, the Goldsboroughs, on their own virtuous and ancestral porch, with portraits of two Signer and three bishop ancestors within hearing distance, accused of being an undesirable environment!

"We are," said John with commendable calm. "And we're about as nice a family as you'd find anywhere, or so I've always heard."

Carolyn Landon laughed a little, and John laughed, and things were better.

"But she promised her to me!" said Carolyn.

"But she promised her to me, and I've had her almost a month," said John. "She promised me first."

It was rather a deadlock. Of course, Carolyn

Landon could have swept down with policemen and carried off the child, and there could have been all sorts of trouble. But she wasn't that kind of a person at all. She was the same grade of person the Goldsboroughs were, barring a little extra college education and feminism, and she proved quite fair-minded.

"If I'm convinced that you can do better for her than I can," she said at the end of a half-hour's discussion, "I'll leave her with you. Her mother really isn't a good person for her to be with. She's too unhappy, and she might give the child a psychic scar she would never recover from."

John hadn't the remotest idea what psychic scars were, but he agreed with her just the same. The end of it was that the girls were summoned back, and Carolyn had tea with them very amicably, and they all liked her. And she and John agreed to give an afternoon to talking it over on Saturday. Meanwhile she was willing to leave Althea with them. She said she would say so to Mrs. Le Mare.

"That's a plucky little thing!" said John in admiration when she had gone. "She works hard,

too, from what she says. She oughtn't to have to wear herself out all her vacation arguing about who gets the baby. I'm going to try to give her a good time Saturday."

"No-bul brother!" said Isabella, flinging herself into his arms and pretending to faint. "We all work hard, too. When do we get taken out?"

But John detached her.

It was to a summer stock matinee that he took her, they thought, though they never knew. At least, a good deal of arguing went on between times, though no conclusion was reached, John reported.

All through the golden summer months John and Carolyn continued to wrestle over the baby. John took Carolyn canoeing on the precarious rivulet at Rose Valley, and explained to her that he could support the child much more adequately than she could. And Caroyln, being a business person of advanced ideas, took John out to Valley Forge on the boat, and paid for him in spite of his furious protestations, explaining to him meanwhile that no man had the same claims to a child a girl had. By

degrees they got to have regular days that they spent together, mostly on the water, though sometimes it was golf or tennis.

His sisters, who, as they took care he remembered, stayed at home caring for Althea, had a vivid interest in these prolonged arguments and the length of time it took to settle the baby's future.

"It's just that much clear gain," John explained magisterially to Angela, Janetta, Annice and Isabella (Sandy and Worrell he quieted by simpler methods). "All the time I keep Carolyn discussing it we're in the baby—don't you see? Caroyln says it's only fair that we should have Thea till we've thrashed things all out. Caro *is* fair-minded!"

"I see," replied in varying tones Isabella, Annice, Janetta and Angela. And said no more.

It was the middle of August, and still John and Carolyn were having it out. It was on one of their canoeing trips that it suddenly came to John, not for the first time, what a brave, dear little thing she was, and how hard she worked. And she had no one to take care of her, nothing but a mother.

And yet she was so sweet and independent about it all! And such blue eyes! . . .

"Caro," he spoke.

She lifted her hand from the water, where she had been trailing it, and smiled at him. They were very close friends by this time.

"What is it, Jack?"

"Caro," he said hesitatingly, "I've thought of a way we could settle about Althea. Why not—both take her?"

Carolyn flushed.

"You mean, turn about?" she said. "That would be very bad for her."

John threw back his handsome young head impatiently.

"I don't mean anything like that, and you know I don't!" he said. "I mean—you *know* what I mean, Caro!"

"You'd better tell me, though," said Caro softly. "But I . . . I generally like your plans, Jack. . . ."

He took her back to Philadelphia this time,

though she generally wouldn't let him, because it meant a long, tedious trip for him back again on the local. This time it seemed such a pity to miss any time they could have together that she allowed it gladly. . . .

They would surely have enough to marry on by fall, especially as he was certain of his raise. Enough for them both and Althea. . . . That idea of hers of going on working was all nonsense, but he'd get it out of her head—just a little more persuading—she was so sweet! He could see her now, coming to meet him . . . they would take that house of the Grants', near enough home so it wouldn't really be a break . . . she would stand at the door in a little blue dress, with her hair parted that quaint little way, with Thea clinging to her hand, waiting for him. She had such blue eyes.

He was at his own gate by this. And he could see, as he went up the path, that a good many of his sisters were about the place. Three of them, to be exact, sat in a neat row on the top step. Annice was missing, for she and her lover were

watching a sunset elsewhere. But Janetta had the Colonial pillar to the right; Angela leaned against the left-hand pillar; Isabella, erect and sparkling-eyed, her brown curls about her shoulders, sat like an arrow in the center. They were all obviously bursting with news.

Usually John liked news as well as anyone, but to-night it affected him scarcely at all. He merely walked up the steps, swerving a little so as not to tread on Isabella, and thinking about Carolyn's eyes.

"John!" said a chorus of sisters, while Isabella from her eligible central position sprang on him, as was her wont, bodily.

"John! Mrs. Le Mare's been here!"

It didn't seem an adequate cause for the excitement that even his preoccupied mind sensed. If Mrs. Le Mare had *not* been there it would have been a greater cause for wonder.

"Has she?" he asked calmly, removing Isabella, who clutched him again immediately by the arm.

"Let *me* tell!" said Janetta. And being the most

fluent and dominant of the sisters, and John's special chum, she took up the tale.

"She came here yesterday, John, and walked straight into the musicale Angela was giving her pupils."

"And all the time Dorothy Dabney was singing," interposed Angela, "she kept telling Mrs. Dabney about Boy, and the things she wrote him the night before about his duty to her. . . . You know those fearful, long-drawn-out details she goes into."

"And of course," Janetta snatched at the tale again, "Mrs. Dabney was wild, and so was Angela. So I saw something had to be done—you know yourself, Jack," Janetta broke off to appeal to him, "something *had* to be done."

"M'hm," said John, listening now, but still rather at sea. (Caro would have known what to do! She was such a decided little darling!)

"So Jan took her out," said Angela plaintively, "*very* gently, and explained that Mrs. Dabney had come there to hear Dorrie sing, and she mustn't interrupt."

John grinned.

"*Very* gently, eh? Well, I'm glad somebody got after her. How'd she take it?"

"Oh, like Mary's little lamb, *then,*" Janetta answered with a disgusted fling of one strong young shoulder. "But——"

Isabella, who had been fretting like a curbed pony, broke in at this exciting point.

"She came back this morning, just *shining* with meek satisfaction. And—she's got quite a new home for Althea!"

At this John *did* feel slightly surprised. Not violently—the wonderful fact that Caro was going to marry him dulled even this. He wondered for a minute if she would take him now that there wasn't any Althea for a bond. Then he smiled at himself. He loved Caro and Caro loved him, and what difference would anything make to her?

"Don't you *care?*" demanded the outraged Isabella. "And here we've all been bewailing Althea's departure all day and saying 'Poor John! How will he feel?'"

"How did it happen? Who has her now?" temporized John.

"A very rich old Miss Archibald out on the Main Line," Belle told him. "I hope she's pernickety! Mrs. Le Mare hopes she'll end by taking her, too, as a companion."

"She is almost certain she will," Angela finished quietly.

John's family felt rather disappointed in him.

"Oh, I see," said John placidly. "Then her idea all along *was* to get adopted with the kid. Cæsar!"

And he began to laugh light-heartedly. John felt very happy. He was a very attractive person to look at, perched on the railing with his white teeth gleaming and his gray eyes alight. But his sisters felt wronged at him.

Angela smiled a little and said nothing—Angela was a lenient person, as the eldest of eight is likely to be. Janetta compressed her scarlet lips.

"Thank goodness!" she opened them to say severely, "*some* men have feelings!" and she produced a letter from inside her frock, which she

began to read; a letter commencing "Dearest little Jan."

Isabella came straight out with it.

"John, I think you're a perfect pig!" said she. "Here we all thought you were such a wonder—almost human emotions—and Mrs. Grayson advertising your nobility all over every New Thoughtery she belongs to—and you don't care as much about losing darling little Althea as you did when I sat on your Angora guinea-pig! You—you haven't *any* mother-heart!"

Under ordinary circumstances this would have begun a wild affray, but to-night John did not want to fight. It was too wonderful an evening to mar. The picture of Caro in the doorway came into his mind again—Caro in the little blue frock, with her blue eyes watching for him and a little girl clinging to her hand——

"My mother-heart's all right," said John contentedly.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Worrell Gollsborough looked across at his older brother John, with a thoughtful frown behind his bone glasses.

"I wish I knew more about girls," he said.

It was a November night of peculiar howliness, and John and Worrell, both of whom had work to do, had retired to the room they had made into a study at the top of the house. There was a fire in the fireplace, and a student lamp on the table. They had put out the most talkative sister, Isabella, the yellow cat, and the youngest setter, and had prepared for a long silent evening.

Usually it was John, not Worrell, who broke the silences between them. John looked at his brother in surprise, and puffed violently at his pipe, then took it out to reply.

"If you don't know about girls now, you never will," said he. . . . "I don't know, though.

Caro's different. But for the most of 'em, I should think being brought up with five would help."

"Oh, sisters!" said Worrell. "Sisters don't count."

John grinned.

"I wish they could hear you," he said, tipping back his handsome head and making smoke-rings. "What's on your mind? Florrie?"

Worrell nodded.

"I don't get any farther, and I don't get any nearer," he said mournfully, laying down the plans he was working on, and abandoning any pretense of work.

"I know what I'd get," said John the debonair. "Another girl."

Worrell bristled at that.

"I notice you don't," he said.

"Caro," said John simply again, "is different."

As John was engaged in a fearful struggle with Caro, just about then, as to woman's place in the home, Worrell could have retorted that Caro wasn't different. But though Caro might insist on con-

tinuing to support herself after she had married John, at least she had definitely promised. So Worrell did not retort. He merely pulled the plans toward him again and tried to look as if he had said nothing. John, however, was just waking up, and too comfortably tilted to drop down again and work.

"Sorry for you," he said sympathetically. "Just what is the matter, old chap?"

Worrell unbent and grinned a little. "Same old backing and filling," he said. "Jack, I wish you'd hand out some advice on the situation."

"Advice!" snorted John. "You don't want advice one bit. Not the advice you'd get from me, anyway!"

Worrell reached across the table for a match, and lay back in his chair again.

"Certainly I want advice! What do you suppose I'm telling you my most private affairs for, if I don't?"

"To give yourself a chance to talk about Florrie Hood, of course," retorted John crushingly. "Private affairs!—Rats! The whole town has known

that you were trying to marry Florrie for the last two years."

Worrell allowed himself a shamefaced grin, then looked defiant.

"No reason why the town shouldn't know it," said he. "It's an excellent habit for a young man to get into, if I do say it myself."

He gazed raptly through a smoke-ring. "There are times when I'd swear that girl was on the point of accepting me. Then—some little thing I can't fathom, and she's off again. If I only knew the scientific dope on why girls are so, and could work it—but I don't suppose even a shark like you does, John."

John leaped up in excitement.

"But—but, look here, Worrell!" he exclaimed. "I just remembered it. Here's a book Caro made me read last week, and it tells about it. Awfully interesting dope."

Worrell shook his head.

"There's one thing Heaven in its mercy has spared me, and that's following up Carolyn Landon's taste in literature," he said, with an appalling

lack of reverence for his brother's sweetheart. "What is it? You're just the same as you always were, Jack, and I think it's darn unfair. When we were kids you always bullied me into taking half your medicine, and now you're trying to make me read all these books Caro improves you with!"

John's enthusiasm was unquenchable, and his life in a large frank family kept him from being thin-skinned.

"You idiot! It's a way to know about girls; just the thing you were worrying about. And you shy off just because it's in a book. There's a reason for everything they do when they're dealing with men. Only they don't know it, most of the time—not unless they read up, like Caro. Most girls haven't the brains."

Worrell came and looked over John's shoulder in hope, and then flumped back into his chair.

"Oh, that!" he said disgustedly. "No, thank you! I read that Psyche-analytic book, or whatever its bally name is, two whole chapters of it, when you brought it home. Nothing doing! I have a

dream book that came with Grace's patent pills. I like it better."

"No, but listen!" expostulated John. "You didn't keep on long enough. That book gives a reason why some girls won't marry—never marry at all—the nicest and best of 'em. Want to hear it?"

"Oh, go on," Worrell resigned himself with an interest he tried to conceal.

John assumed a scholarly attitude.

"Well, to begin with, you admit that Florrie Hood's a devoted daughter?"

"Sure she is. That's the kind that makes the best wives," said Worrell, who was doggedly in love, and prepared to jump to Florrie's defense at a breath.

John shook his finger at him.

"Yes, they make the best wives—*if* they make wives at all. But most of 'em don't. And why? Because, my young friend, they're too devoted to their fathers. You've heard them say—you've probably heard Florrie say—'I'll never marry till I find as good a man as my father.'

"An' they mean it, b'gosh," he went on, "a lot more than they know. They've got a father-complex, that's what they've got, and they've had the habit of loving their fathers so long that only a man really like him can have the least bit of a show with them."

"Sounds like piffle," commented Worrell, but in his eyes a light was dawning. "You mean to say that Florrie will never marry till she finds a man the picture of old Hood?"

"I do. Here's the documents to prove it," John waved to a popular magazine that lay on the table. "You can read *that* if Freud is too deep for your limited young mind. That says so too."

Worrell fell on the article, which had carefully been made intelligible for the tired business man, and read it through in what was a very short time, for him.

"Well, it says so," he admitted, looking at John severely. "What about it? Do you mean to say that if I acquired a pair of those pleased-to-meet-the-mustache whiskers like Mr. Hood's and spectacles instead of glasses, and argued violently about

every useless thing that came along, that Florrie'd take me? I see myself!"

Worrell dropped back into his plans, and preserved a massive silence until bedtime, and John, who had not been more than half in earnest, finished his pipe, and sauntered off to his own bedroom to write an impassioned letter to Caro.

But next evening, an evening that Worrell always consecrated to Florrie, John happened to walk into his bedroom in quest of a clothes-brush. Worrell, before the glass, whisked around as if to conceal himself, thought better of it and whisked into view again.

"What do you think of this brand of collar, John?" he asked. John eyed the collar analytically.

"Rotten!" said he cheerily.

"That's a nice way to talk, after you made me do it!" said Worrell reproachfully.

"Made you wear a collar with a southern exposure—and, good gracious, a tie like that with a business suit!"

"It's the kind Hood wears," Worrell countered, scarlet but firm.

For once there was nothing for John to do but say "Oh!"

"I look like a guy," continued Worrell feverishly, "and what's more, I'm going to cultivate one of these soup-length mustaches—I won't go as far as Hood's face-draperies even to get Florrie. But I guess I can stand a mustache like his—for a while. And if it doesn't work, John Everingham Goldsborough, I'm going to *kill* you!"

Now, Florrie Hood's father was a very brilliant man. He was also erratic. He usually had a new hobby over which he poured all the enthusiasm of which he was capable. He was exceedingly demonstrative to his family, and particularly to his daughter, whom he worshiped. And withal, everybody who came anywhere near him adored him exceedingly, unless they happened to detest him.

That was the man, good, dogged, even-tempered Worrell Goldsborough, who was just a nice clever young fellow making a start in life, had set out to try to be like in order to win his lady-love. And none of Arthur's knights had a much harder task.

He ran the gantlet of the large, frank family

aforesaid with outward calm. It might have been worse; Janetta told him that he had made a mistake, that that was the janitor's collar; and Annice said in a heartbroken whisper that she expected Arnold over immediately, and would he mind going out the back door before Arnold saw him; and Sandy asked him politely when he had taken up Art, alluding to the Buster Brown tie he sported. Angela had two men in the parlor, and Isabella was off skating, so he was spared the worst. He went stolidly on. The Rock of Gibraltar was easier to move than Worrell Goldsborough once his mind was made up. He had what his family reverently alluded to as the Everingham will—it had come from a Boston lady of the early nineteenth century, whom the Goldsborough of that period had married—and nobody ever attempted to shake it.

Florrie Hood, like most daughters, had a good deal of her father in her. She was tall and slim and intense, with a sweetness and vivacity that alternated with sad little ways which Worrell thought were even sweeter than the gaynesses, if possible. And she had kept her lover—her lovers,

rather, for Worrell was by no means the only one—on and off, and guessing most constantly, ever since she was seventeen, which was three years now.

She was at her gayest and happiest to-night, and she ran out to the gate to greet Worrell. Her red-gold hair was a little wind-tossed, and her creamy skin was flushed. Her eyes, which were so much like sea-water that nobody ever tried to say what color they were, lighted up in a way that would have encouraged Worrell very much, if he hadn't seen the very same look many a time before—usually the night before Florrie froze up and had to be thawed out by the continuous patience of weeks.

"Oh, Worrell, you're a late young man!" she began gayly. "I always thought I could set my watch by you, and it never goes right, poor thing!"

Worrell started to explain, for normally he rather prided himself on his punctuality, and only a good reason ever made him late anywhere. But he remembered his rôle just in time. He had doggedly made up his mind to act, as far as in him lay, exactly as Florrie's father had acted when he went a-courting. He hated it.

"Time was made for slaves," he quoted a saying of Mr. Hood's. "Let's go for a walk down the road. It's too wonderful a night to go in."

Now Florrie was dressed as a girl who expects her lover dresses, and her daringly yellow silk frock was thin, and so were her slippers and stockings.

Florrie stared at him in astonishment. Usually when Worrell asked her to go a-walking he gave her a day's warning, and himself fussed over the right thickness for her shoes and the adequacy of tam and sport-coat and gloves, before he would let her start. He was a most comforting person to a young lady who never took any care of herself.

"Wait till I change my shoes," she said.

"Nonsense! I'll get you a cloak off the rack."

He ran in and came out again with a golf-cloak of ancient lineage, which had stayed on the hall-rack since last golf-cloaks were in fashion, because Mr. Hood liked the way its lines fell against the wall.

When Worrell had flung it round her, Florrie fell mechanically into step as he thrust a strong arm through hers, and hurried her down the road, quot-

ing poetry, as he went, about the wind. It was Kipling, because he had never got any further in poetry than Kipling and Service and a stray bit of Walt Mason now and then. It did not fit very well to the occasion.

But—Worrell quoting poetry! Florrie kept very still.

When Worrell had finished what he could remember of his poem, he began to discourse at length about himself. That Florrie's yellow satin slippers would never be the same again, and that her frock was hopelessly bedraggled, seemed to concern him not at all.

They covered a good five miles by the time Worrell had engineered them back into the sitting-room. Florrie sank into a chair, panting and silent still. Her cloak, fallen back, revealed that the hem of her skirt was wet, torn, muddied, and that her feet were drenched above the ankles.

A sudden panic seized Worrell. Suppose he had killed her—suppose Florrie caught pneumonia and died! What use, then, would all this be?

"Hadn't you better change your things?" he

ventured, dropping back for a moment into the Worrell of old.

She shook her head. "I often get as wet as this."

"You little idiot, go change them!" he exploded. His heart gave a great spring at the idea of calling Florrie such a thing. But his doggedness helped him through.

"Go change them, darling!" he urged; and "darling" was what he had never called her before, any more than he had the other name. But the imitation of Mr. Hood was still thorough.

Florrie looked at him in a strange way. Usually she met his suggestions with an airy and affectionate contempt which veiled a genuine admiration of his thoughtfulness. But to-night she rose without a word and trailed upstairs, coming back a little later in another dress and another mood. She was brilliant again, with a brilliancy he couldn't penetrate, and that made him feel as if he were talking to somebody in a play.

Worrell had never seen Florrie a bit like that before. But he went home with the conviction that he had made some sort of an impression on her,

anyway, and the experiment was worth keeping up.

He decided to go on with his rôle until Christmas. Then he would burst in on Christmas day, and demand that she give herself to him, his Christmas present. Mr. Hood was very fond of picturesque things like that, he knew. He had proposed to Mrs. Hood on St. Valentine's day, and still related it with a half-humorous, half-graceful appreciation of the deed's appropriateness.

Worrell deliberately allowed his trim little mustache to acquire the droop of the seventies, like Mr. Hood's, and got spectacles with gold rims and ear-hooks. This last was the final sacrifice, because the ear-hooks cut into him badly. His family thought he had gone mad, and told him so. They hoped secretly that he would get over it before the time of Annice's marriage. He acted toward Florence as her father treated her mother; caressing devotion or explosions, and wild excursions off into places where he knew Florrie didn't want to go.

And Florrie herself? Well, Florrie was an enigma in an entirely new way. She was gentle, and docile in a strange fashion. She had lost her

moods and her gayety. She was *subdued.* That was the word for it. And it pretty nearly broke poor Worrell's heart to see it, especially when she tried most pathetically to fit into the wild ways that he himself didn't like at all!

She never fought him off or coaxed him near any more. And he had no idea at all whether it meant that he had lost his last chance of marrying her or whether John's suggestion had been the right one, and she was his for the asking.

He had begun, and he could only keep on. For one result, Mr. Hood admired him immensely. Of that at least, he was sure. The affair of the chickens had clinched it.

It was one night toward the end of November that he came over on a visit to Florrie, announcing proudly the possession of his newest hobby. He was going to start in with a chicken-farm as soon as spring came, and he showered the Hoods with details. Florrie was not enthusiastic, but Mr. Hood was, immensely.

"You mean—you don't really mean to keep chickens?" she had faltered.

Worrell sprang up, in the way that was becoming almost natural now.

"I do mean it," he fairly shouted, leaning forward and shaking a finger wildly at her. "Chicken raising is the one thing at which a man has practically no chance of failing!"

Florrie shrank back against the wall. He could have sworn that her eyes filled with tears, though there was no reason why they should.

Mr. Hood, sitting in the background, clapped his hands in approval.

"That's right! I like to see a young man enthusiastic!" he cried.

But Worrell wasn't worrying at all about what Mr. Hood liked to see. He was furtively watching Florrie, his pretty, bright Florrie, flung back against the wall as if she were seeing something that frightened her. But what, he could not make out.

Even for Annice's wedding he refused to cut off the trailing ends of his mustache, though Annice herself came to him the night before her marriage, and begged him to, with tears in her voice. He was almost melted; she looked so pretty and

wistful, and so like an old and sorrowful engraving of a broken-hearted lady, looking up at him with her small brown hands clasped.

"Janetta says you look like a walrus or a Viking," she said, "and Isabella thinks you've made an election bet of some awful kind, that doesn't come out till a long time afterward; and Mother—Mother's afraid you're going to be queer, like Uncle Alpheus that went to the Philippines and never did anything after but quote 'The Road to Mandalay' and wish he was dead. She says you're getting to look like him! Oh, Worrell, if you knew how badly we all felt——"

It took a dreadful effort on Worrell's part to resist her, for Annice had always been his favorite sister, she was so small and gentle and appealing, and believed so implicitly whatever her brothers said to her.

"I—I can't, Annice," he said. "It is a sort of bet. John knows about it; I made him promise to keep quiet, but he can tell you it's all right. And I promise that after Christmas I'll straighten out and act the way I used to."

Annice was relieved at even this concession, and kissed him radiantly before she fluttered off. She must have quieted the family, in her womanly little way, for nobody said anything more to him. They looked at him with a sort of wondering awe.

So he kept doggedly on.

Christmas night he braced himself to go over and propose. He minded it, for some reason, more than he had any of his proposals to Florrie. For one thing, he had decided that it was to be the last. Either way, he was not going to try any more.

"I feel like a fool," he said, glaring at John the unruffled, over his spectacles. "The decent way to propose is the way I've always done it—just ask Florrie if she doesn't think it's time she married me, or something else quiet and self-respecting like that. And I think it's silly to pick out a holiday to propose on."

John, who felt by this time like Frankenstein, looked at his creation with a certain alarm. Worrell had been behaving explosively for so long now that it was becoming almost natural, and finding that it

had an effect even on his older brother, occasionally exploded at home.

"Cut it out, Worrell," he said uneasily. "I never meant to sic you on to any such wild scheme as this when I hurled that bally old book at you. No girl on earth's worth all this."

"But she's coming around!" Worrell could not forbear saying, with triumph in his gold-spectacled eye. "And—and you might do a little reading up in that book yourself, old scout. I haven't noticed that Caro's yielded so very much about wanting to support you! Look in the book and see!"

And with this final shot, Worrell crunched off over the snow to propose to Florrie.

Once arrived at Florrie's he warmed to his rôle in spite of everything. She had never looked more adorable than she did that Christmas night, still in the heavy white frock she had put on in honor of the day, with a cluster of holly at each side of her heavy twist of red-gold hair.

He wanted to sit quietly down beside her and talk to her gently, telling her how sweet she was, and how quietly happy they could be together if

she would only marry him. Instead, he came in exuberantly, greeted her with an indifferent gayety, and then plunged in.

"Look here, Florrie," he said brusquely, "do you know you're going to marry me this day week? You needn't argue—you've nothing to say about it. . . . You're going to, that's all."

Florrie looked at him, wide-eyed, for a moment, sitting slender and vivid and holly-crowned. Then, instead of answering, she burst into tears. She slid off her chair and flung herself down by it with her pretty, bright head buried on her arms, and sobbed stormily.

Worrell was down beside her in a moment. He forgot all about playing up to her father-complex. He forgot that he had intended to bully her and startle her and be enthusiastic over her. He merely slipped one arm gently about her, so as not to startle her at all, and spoke in the old quiet way.

"Don't cry, Florrie. Please don't cry. Dear, you don't have to marry me at all. I—I want you to, of course, but you needn't a bit. Why, I

wouldn't have my darling do anything she didn't want to, not for the world!"

Florrie lifted her head, half-unbelieving, and looked at him from under her long, wet eyelashes.

"Oh, Worrell," she burst out, "you sounded like yourself again! . . . Oh, if you knew how it sounded to hear you speak like my Worrell once more——"

She began to cry again, but she crept closer to him. He was very much astonished, but he had enough presence of mind to put both arms around her instead of only one, and to pull her around, still gently, till they were both leaning against the chair together, on the floor.

"But if you liked me the other way, darling," he said, still softly, "why wouldn't you ever marry me?"

"Do I have to tell you?" she asked.

"No, indeed, dear," he assured her. "Only it would be a little fairer to me, perhaps, if you would."

"Let's sit on the sofa," she said. "It's silly,

being on the floor here, like two children. . . . Yes, I *will* tell you, though it's a dreadful thing to tell anyone—but you don't count, do you, Worrell?"

"Why, no, sweetheart," he said, and she seemed to agree with him that it was all right for him to draw her head down on his shoulder.

"It was—I didn't want to marry anybody," she began desperately. "I was—afraid."

"Afraid of what, darling?"

They were both taking it for granted, by this time, that anything about her not marrying him was in the past tense.

"Of being married to a man!" said Florrie with determination. "You know, Worrell, I do love father, ever and ever so much. Don't you think I do?"

Did he think she did? After these months, the irony of that question!

"I do," he said with a vicious emphasis.

"I do love him," she reiterated. "But—well, dear, father's awfully wearing to live in the house with. At bottom he's sweet and kind and dependa-

ble, just as you are, but the things he is on top nearly drive me frantic.

"You know, I'm flyaway and intense and excitable myself—oh, I know my bad points! So the kind of man I always wanted was like you, Worrell, of course, dignified and quiet and gentle—a man who wouldn't tear his hair if the paper was late, or have once-a-day enthusiasms that his womenfolk had to pretend to be eager about.

"But I couldn't believe there was such a man. You know, married women always tell girls, 'Oh, wait until you're married! You'll see, they're entirely different then.' So I didn't believe that even you were really like what you seemed, because I so wanted you to be.

"I—I just didn't dare be sure. And I've just simply got to have a rest. . . . So I kept saying 'no' and 'no.'"

"But, then, dear, what broke you up so just now?" he asked. "And why didn't you drop me when I began to—perform that way?"

She nestled nearer him. "Must I tell you that, too?"

"Please!"

It came with an impulsive rush.

"Well, I'd like to see the girl that could have you around for three years and not adore you, no matter what you turned into! That was the dreadful part of it—here you'd become everything I didn't want to marry—all the things I was afraid of had come true—and I loved you so much I couldn't let you go! Do you wonder I was unhappy?"

"You didn't *like* it?"

She looked at him as if she thought he had taken leave of his senses. Then a light dawned on her. "Worrell, you dear, blessed idiot, you weren't doing it on *purpose?*"

Worrell nodded. "It wasn't natural at all. I'm really the sort of person I always was, honey. I never worked so hard in my life as I have trying not to be even-tempered, these last three months. I—I read about it in a magazine. It said that what a girl really wanted was a man like her father. So I tried."

Then—but remember, she had known that Worrell was her property for some years now—she sat

up and took off the spectacles, and looked down into his honest, boyish blue eyes. Then she deliberately kissed him. She began to laugh.

"But, you goose, you have the theory all wrong! I've read all that, too. And you *are* like Father in the underneath things that count. You're dependable and all that. So is he. I've often noticed how like him you were. Those surface mannerisms don't count one bit. Read another chapter!"

But Worrell was too well occupied. He kept one arm around Florrie. With the other hand he took off his gold spectacles and hurled them deliberately to the end of the room, where they broke softly. He replaced them with his bone glasses, sighing with relief as he did so.

"I can't change my necktie or my mustache till I get home," he said. "But, Florence Hood, if anyone ever tells you I didn't love you, send them to my family!"

"I don't need to," said she.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Isabella and John were the last ones down to breakfast, and they looked across at each other and grinned companionably, as at partners in iniquity.

"The atmosphere of this house is getting lax," said John. "Since you haven't Annice to wake you up and chase you downstairs, you never get to breakfast on time."

Isabella sighed.

"This is getting to be pretty nearly a sisterless home," she said. "If Angela weren't at home I'd be desolated. What with Debby gone, and Janetta poising on the brink, and Annice so married to Arnold that I expect every day to find she's taken to wearing caps, the house feels as empty as a barrel. And there's Sandy, even, going down to visit Deborah in South Carolina next month. Like as not he'll come back married to the hilt."

"Matrimony," said John oracularly, feeding the

remains of his chop to the youngest setter, "must be faced by all."

"That means you've persuaded Caro to come to terms," said Isabella shrewdly. "Well, I personally have no intention of facing it for ages; not till I've got all there is out of my young life."

"You?" said John, highly startled. "Why, Belle, you aren't old enough to think about it for years to come."

"You just think so because I'm the youngest," said Belle, lifting her head. "Gaze at me for a moment with an unprejudiced eye. I had a perfectly good proposal last week—none of your old leftovers, either—a quite new man. And if I know the symptoms, another is on its way to me. I should not speak thus to everyone, you understand," said Isabella, drooping her head coyly, and giving her brother an opportunity to notice that her brown curls were knotted on the very top of her head; "but to you, beloved brother, I will tell all. I am considered most attractive, and I'm eighteen years of age. I am a charming brunette. What about it, Beatrice Fairfax?"

"I certainly should advise you *not* to speak thus to everyone," said John. "Why can't you be more like Caro? Now, there's a girl who never thinks of herself. She just goes along doing good to everybody——"

Isabella must have pinched the second eldest setter, for it uttered a terrible howl at this point.

"Whether they need it or not," she muttered under cover of the setter's howl. "I do hate these people who are so noble!" Caro had tried to convert her to a Cause the week before, and Isabella didn't think highly of Causes. She had a terrible vision in her mind's eye of John, at the age of forty, sitting meekly on one side of platforms, as the husband of the speaker. But she said nothing of it.

"Who's the next victim?" inquired John when he had done putting out the setter, and had come back for his second cup of coffee.

Isabella looked at him under her long, curling eyelashes. She was certainly as pretty a girl as you could find, John reflected, if she only hadn't been so impertinent.

"Francis Palliser," she said.

John whooped in a way that was most undignified for a successful young business man who intended to get married soon.

"Francis Palliser? That poor little pup?"

"I'm not going to *marry* him!" protested Isabella, justly angered at this disparagement of her prey. "But he's one of the most charming men I know. Everybody says so."

"He writes poetry, and speaks in a sweet tenor voice, and when he talks he cocks his head on one side and waves his little hands at you!" said John.

It was all true, but that did not alter Isabella's desire to kill her brother.

"And if I told you that Caro Landon was a dogmatic, one-ideaed, cock-sure young college-product who knows less about life now than I did at ten——" she struck back.

John would have gone off in speechless anger, and not have spoken to Isabella again till she had apologized three times, if the end of her sentence had not struck him as so ridiculous that he laughed

in spite of himself. It happened to be true, but John did not know it.

"You little idiot!" he said amiably. "Cut it out!"

Isabella, her temper restored—it was the flash and over kind anyway—said she was sorry, and peace reigned.

"But what I like about Francis," she went on sweetly, "is that nobody understands me as he does. He's *so* sympathetic!"

"The idea of a big husky girl like you needing to be understood!" said John. "Sure he understands you. So would any man that stopped to take the trouble—sliding around and cuddling up to girls."

"*Could* any man?" queried his sister dreamily.

"Sure," said John confidently. He himself was the variety of youth who doesn't have to understand women at all—never being given time by them. "Look at old Max. He'd be that kind if he gave himself half a chance. He's that gentle, pussy-footed kind naturally. He could work up into being a regular lady's-sympathy-bureau if he wasn't too

much of a real fellow. If Max let himself he could be as much of a muff-hound as your dear Francis."

"Muff-hound?" queried Isabella, with an expression of vivid interest that had been wanting before. "That's a lovely word—but why muff-hound?"

"A muff-hound," elucidated her brother as he rose to go to his train, "is a fuzzy little white animal with a clinging disposition, that some misguided females carry around with them in muffs. See?"

"M'hm," smiled his sister, continuing to sit at the breakfast table, and lingeringly finishing a bit of toast. "And poor, dear Max Warner has nobly abstained from having women pet him all these cruel years, just because he couldn't have your bull-dog fascinations and would use no other? My dear John, I don't believe it at all—I don't believe he knows how."

"Nonsense!" said John.

"I am certain he doesn't know how," repeated his sister. "No man would act to his friend's sister like a deprecating icicle if he knew any better. He's

never known there was any other way he could do." Suddenly she sprang up from her chair, full of a purpose.

John looked apprehensive.

"I know what I shall do!" she announced. "I like helping the needy. I will assist your dear old college chum. When I am through with him——"

"Oh, I say, I don't want our friendship all smashed up!" interjected John.

"It shan't be," Isabella assured him. "Purely platonic—purely uplift. When I am through with him our dear old friend Max shall be the Perfect Muff-Hound!"

"There *is* a girl he wants," suggested her brother seductively. "Awfully pretty blonde over in Lansing."

"I will teach him to win her!" asserted Isabella proudly. Then she thought for a moment. "I suppose I shall have to put my maiden modesty in storage if I'm going to start in with this training."

John chuckled.

"Maiden modesty! Why, if a totally unknown female walked up to old Max and asked him to elope

with her, he'd just tell me afterward what a kind, friendly young woman he'd met."

"Then that's all right," Isabella sighed relievedly.

"I suppose the next time I see Max his cute little golden head will be sticking out of somebody's muff," said John. "One more good man gone wrong!"

"They don't carry muffs this time of the year," responded his sister sweetly. "The next time you see Max his cute little golden head *will* be sticking out of somebody's handbag, maybe."

"Well, women are——" exploded John.

"I thought you understood women?" she inquired.

"What should I want to do that for?" asked this badgered young man.

But instead of answering him Isabella merely waved an absent hand to him for good-by. "I want to think," said she.

After John had gone for his train she continued to think. She cleared the table deftly as she did it, and was so absorbed in her plans that old Grace's

grumblings about late breakfasts scarcely made any impression on her.

"I wonder," said she to the clock, "if I'm destroying Max's chances of matrimony? Because muff-hounds don't marry—they know too much about girls. And Max really should marry, and have a chimney-corner and a wife and five children. . . . But if he doesn't make girls like him better some day he'll marry an awful creature that's hunted him down for his income. Better nobody than that! . . . And he may keep on wanting the blonde. . . . Anyway, it will be fun!" She went over to the telephone. "Ardsley 697," said she in such a determined voice that the operator repeated it meekly after her just as she had said it, instead of turning it upside down in proper 'phone girl fashion. "Is Mr. Warner in?" she asked.

While the maid went to find out she took a final survey of what she was going to do. Because it wasn't too late to draw back yet; she could ask Max if he knew some address, or something else equally noncommittal. Then she shook her head.

"This is a very fine, unselfish thing I'm going

to do," she told herself. "Anybody that works over a man, knowing that the person who'll ultimately get the good out of it is a blonde in Lansing, is almost too noble to live!"

And so fortified she went on with her purpose.

"I have to see you nearly at once," she told the puzzled man at the other end of the telephone. "It's a very important thing indeed. When can you come up?"

Max's voice answered her, a little shy and hesitating.

"I—I'd be glad to come up right away, Isabella. Is—is there anything I can do?"

Isabella smiled to herself impishly.

"Nothing at all. And to-night will do perfectly."

So he told her, still hesitatingly, that he would come up that night, and the incident was closed except that Isabella spent the rest of the day marshalling her facts and sandpapering their edges. She didn't want to hurt Max's feelings any more than was necessary, and as the day wore on she became more and more exercised about what she was going to do. If Max didn't take it the right

way she would lose a very nice, kind acquaintance, a man who could always be called on at a moment's notice to fill in the gaps or make an even number.

"Never mind," she reassured herself. "I'm doing it from the highest motives. Remember the blonde, Belle!"

Max appeared punctually at eight-fifteen. Max bore no physical resemblance to a muff-hound. Indeed, he was not reminiscent of any animal. He was rather slender, rather tall, rather blond, with a nice face which was a little overintense. He was —well, his correctness must have been the most vivid thing about him, for you did notice that.

He put his gloves into his hat—he wore gloves on evening calls, unlike most of his friends of that town—and looked at Isabella with a certain amount of apprehension. It is possible that he wondered what she was going to do to him.

She sat in the old parlor that had seen so many men come and go, and greeted him with a certain air of giving audience. Isabella was going to be an imposing old lady, some fifty years hence. She didn't leave him wondering long.

"Max," she began, when his gloves were safely inside his hat, and his hat safely on the floor beside him. "I want to do something for you. You'll probably think I'm impertinent to suggest it——"

But here Max made her unexpectedly easy. After all, as she told herself, Max had such perfect manners.

"I know I need a good deal done to me," he said with the ghost of a smile. "I—I think you're kind, Isabella, to be interested enough to tell me."

Isabella took heart of grace, settled her ruffles and began all over again.

"I don't know," she said tactfully, "but supposing, just supposing—there was a girl you were interested in—why, a girl always knows lots of things about what another girl likes. And—and if you wouldn't mind I could show you."

Max wore tortoise-shell spectacles, because they were so much more comfortable. His eyes were large and clear and blue. They widened perceptibly at this, and he took the spectacles carefully off and folded them up as neatly as he had the gloves.

"If you fold up anything more," said Isabella determinedly, "I'll scream."

So Max checked himself in the very act of folding his handkerchief in neat parallel creases, and composed himself to moveless attention.

"It's this way," Isabella plunged joyously in. "Almost all the difficulties in the world come from people's trying to be different from what they really are. If you're one kind of a person, the thing to do is to be as fine a grade of that kind of person as you possibly can. For instance, John's a rather old-fashioned type, not but that he's an excellent specimen . . . but he belongs to what the novelists used to call the masterful school. He rather bullies girls."

"Yes," said Max in a depressed but rather interested way, "but they seem to like it very much. I can't do that, you know . . . I shouldn't do it affectionately enough."

Here was Isabella's opening, and she sprang for it.

"No, you couldn't," she said—and he sighed a little. Perhaps he had hoped she would say he could.

"That's just what I was saying to you," she went on. "Now, you'd have to start a different way. But you could your way, as well as John does his."

"I—I haven't any way," Max stated in his usual ungarnished manner, "and I never know what to say to girls, anyhow. Talking to them is one of the most uphill things I know."

Isabella looked at him pityingly. Was that why he always seemed the deprecating icicle of her description? Why . . . why, there might be a *lot* to Max that she'd never thought about. He might be really interesting, once he was trained to be articulate. She felt quite pleased and charmed at the idea of teaching him to express himself.

"Don't you know what kind of a person you are?" she demanded.

He shook his head.

"Not the least bit," he replied.

This was encouraging, because, thought Isabella, she could probably tell him nearly anything improving about himself with a fair chance of being believed.

"I'll tell you," said she; and paused a moment to invent the most useful characteristic she could think of. "You're sensitive," she pursued, and was surprised to see him flush. . . . Why, probably it was true! "And you don't like to hurt people's feelings. So you wouldn't be likely to be the bullying kind. You could be the sort of man that sympathizes with girls."

Max looked at her in surprise.

"Do girls need sympathy?" he asked. "I thought they were always such cheerful, rather hard people! They always seemed to be either a little laughing or a good deal bored."

"Oh, yes," she answered him earnestly, "girls need sympathy—lots of sympathy. And they like the people who give it."

She seemed perplexed.

"How do you know when they want it?" he inquired.

"Oh, use your head," flashed Isabella, a bit impatiently. Really, Max was stupid. "Suppose I said I had a headache?"

"Why, I'd say I was sorry," answered Max, in exactly his usual cool and unemotional tone.

"Oh, not like that!" cried Isabella despairingly. "You should put interest in it. Say it in a tender sort of voice, and ask how I got it, and recommend something for it, and act generally as if the one desire of your life was to have that headache go away. Oh, can't you see the principle of it? Act as if you *understood.*"

"Would that be—honest?" demanded Max doubtfully.

"Oh, of course, if you don't care whether I have any headache or not!" said Isabella petulantly.

"But I do!" protested Max. "But you haven't any."

"I have, too!" flared Belle. "Now, you can just practise on me. It's—it's adorably good of me to let you. Say you're sorry."

"I feel as if I'd been naughty and had to apologize," objected Max, with an unexpected flash of humor. "But I really am sorry, Isabel."

"Go on being sorry realistically," said his instructress, unrelenting.

"Is there anything I can do for you?" he pursued timidly.

"You might offer to rub my head," suggested Isabella.

Max looked horrified.

"I—I don't believe I'd know how," he protested, imperfectly concealing his terror at having to do such an intimate thing.

"Oh, I probably shouldn't let you," Isabella reassured him briskly, "only it shows a willing heart, don't you see? And can't you suggest any remedies for headache?"

"There's that smelly peppermint stuff," he began doubtfully.

"Oh," said Isabella in despair, "you shouldn't do it that way! You ought to have said, in a manly yet tender voice, 'Have you tried a menthol pencil? Oh, you must!'"

He shook his head.

"I give it up, Isabel. I shouldn't have the courage to practise that sort of thing on girls I didn't know. I know they'd think I was bluffing."

"Practise on me some more, then," Isabella offered generously.

She hadn't meant to make the offer, and the leading on of Francis Palliser, whom all the girls had said was uncatchable, would have to be deferred. But Isabella was a good sport. And she did like the sort of uplift work this promised to be.

Max brightened.

"I say, Isabella, that's awfully good of you. When may I start?"

Isabella considered.

"You might take me for a nice long walk in the country," she said.

"What about golf?" asked Max, quite eagerly for him. "Do you play?"

It was surprising how little Max and Isabella knew about each other, considering that he'd been coming in and out of the house for a couple of years. But then Isabella had only been taking a professional interest in men for a little while, now.

"Fairly well," she said.

"Then let's go out to-morrow," he suggested brilliantly.

It is possible that Max may have hoped that the difference between her game and his own would make their companionship a less painfully continuous thing. But Isabella merely accepted sweetly. About then John came in and promptly monopolized Max until Isabella faded away in disgust, and went to see if she couldn't coax Sandy into letting her go to Deborah's instead of him.

"Well," said Isabella to John severely when Max was gone, "don't you know you're interrupting my course of training?"

John's reply was most undignified.

"Wuff, wuff, wuff," he said. "Yap, yap, yap! Poor Max!"

"Not at all," Isabella told him gayly. "He quite likes the idea, and we're going golfing tomorrow together. And if you say anything to him about muff-hounds, or put the matter at all in a—in a lowering light, I'll tell Caro Landon six of the most undignified things about you that I know, and show her your baby-picture that the nurse had taken sticking out of an Easter egg, when Mother didn't know."

John threw up his hands.

"I am Davy Crockett's coon. I am in-no-cent. Go ahead and make a Peripatetic Purrer out of old Max—I see I can't stop you. Perhaps he will."

Isabella laughed.

"A gentle creature like Max?"

"Let me tell you," warned John, "that old Max is about as gentle as a mule when you get down to rock bottom. I went through college with him, remember, not you."

"Heaven be praised!" retorted his sister with spirit. "Going over a golf-course with him is going to be plenty. Only a lofty devotion to the future of the blonde in Lansing could force me to it."

"I think you want something to play with and you think Max is your meat," surmised John cynically. "However, I think he's tough."

Isabella only smiled. When Isabella smiled she was a delightful and disarming young person, and her brother relented.

"She *should* turn all her brother's choicest friends into pink-ribbon pups if she wanted to," he consoled her, ruffling her hair beyond recall.

"He won't be a pup," stated Isabella. "He'll be a charming, sympathetic gentleman."

"All the same," said John heartlessly, considering that he himself could purr charmingly on occasion.

And so the next day Max went golfing with Isabella.

"I'll make things as painless for the poor boy as possible," she decided, and contrived to be as pretty as she knew how, which was a very great deal. Max seemed unmoved by the vision she presented, so she had to remind him.

"Don't you think I look nice?" she demanded.

"Why, yes, you do," acquiesced Max with a note of discovery in his voice.

"Then mention it, please," ordered Isabella. "Don't be flowery, but just pick out some nice little point about me and tell me about it. . . . Oh, *haven't* I any good points?" she added with exasperation, rounding on him.

"I like you in that clinging blue silk thing," responded Max with unexpected poise. "It makes your eyes look darker."

"That's splendid!" Isabella encouraged him. "And you can use it quite as well with a blonde. Tell her it makes her eyes look bluer."

"But it's really true," Max explained soberly, as he built himself a careful hillock for his ball, and nestled it accurately therein.

Isabella only smiled. And thereafter the exigencies of the game separated them for awhile. When they came together again Isabella had acquired another cavalier, an amiable youth who didn't seem to want to play himself, having an altruistic heart, and who was caddying for Isabella with apparent content. He spoke cheerily to Max, and went on with his caddying in a placid manner; and Max, not seeing any way of doing anything else, went on playing all by himself. Occasionally he crossed Isabella and her caddy, but not often. He went round the course in much fewer strokes than usual, because his playing had a certain fire that was sometimes lacking in it. He got back to the clubhouse, had something damp and consoling, and sat down with it on the porch to wait for Isabella. Max really *had* perfect manners.

"I like your idea of a match," said Isabella with indignation, coming up finally without her caddy. Max wondered where she had lost him. "I don't believe you have the faintest idea whether I'm dead or alive. Or perhaps you thought I was Bogey?"

"I thought, as long as you had Thompson," said Max, coloring up, "that you didn't want me."

He said it so obviously in good faith that Isabella relented. "I never drop anything I start to do," she told him. "Now, let's be frank with each other, Max. Didn't you slide off that way because I was a girl and you wanted a little rest from me?"

"No," he answered, "honestly I didn't. I thought you'd rather talk to Thompson. He's interesting."

Isabella was exploring a beautiful lavender soda by this time. She looked across it at Max, who had made this statement in his usual quiet voice.

"Do you mean to tell me that you don't think you're interesting?" she demanded.

"I know I'm not," said he.

"But you are," Isabella insisted. "Do you suppose——" she laughed a little, "that I'd be bother-

ing you this way, trying to show you how to get more pleasure out of life, if you weren't interesting?" She smiled at him engagingly.

He brightened.

Isabella began to laugh.

"There were two things you could have done. You could have monopolized Thompson, talked to him and not to me. It would have made me furious. You see?"

"Not a bit," replied the obtuse Max. "Why should I want to make you furious, when you're being so good to me?"

"To punish me for starting out with you and ending up with somebody else," Isabella told him patiently. "You should stand up for your rights. Don't you see? The basic theory is that you show you put a value on a girl's society, which flatters her. The other way," she went on hastily to avoid further explanations, "would have been to monopolize *me,* leaving Thompson out in the cold. That would also have shown that you liked my society. But just sailing off that way, dropping the whole thing—don't ever do that again!"

"I won't," promised Max, looking happier. He even smiled a bit. "Which do you prefer, next time?" he asked. "Shall I monopolize the man or you?"

"Me, please," said Isabella demurely. "It's much pleasanter."

"That's a bargain," said Max cheerfully. "Let's go round the course again, and see if we can find another man for me to practise on."

"And which have you decided to do?" she asked.

Max grinned—quite a careless, boyish grin.

"I'll decide when the villain appears."

Isabella nearly clapped her hands. Max had spoken quite naturally and lightly. He was getting used to her.

"Come on then, and let's look for him," said she.

But this time they went round in peace and amity, although no villain appeared at all. Isabella had sent him home some hours previous. Isabella thought she had given Max enough pointers for one day, and devoted herself to talking to him very much as she would have talked to her sisters. She carefully avoided any mention of the fact that she

was a girl, and congratulated herself on nearly having made Max forget it. And when they finally parted he said, with what for him was fervor.

"I've enjoyed being with you ever so much, Isabella. You're so much easier to get on with than I thought."

"All girls are," said Isabella, smiling at him encouragingly, "if you only go at it the right way."

She was so wrapped in virtue as she thought over her good day's work at dinner that night, that John told her she looked as if she had eaten the canary.

"Not that anything isn't better than Francis Palliser," he added.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

JANETTA, Angela and Sandy pricked up their ears.

"What's Isabella up to?" they demanded suspiciously, having all had experience with Isabella.

Isabella laughed, and looked down the long table at Janetta with a flash of comradeship that made Janetta feel as if the little sister had really grown up.

"Now that you're a virtuous young person who never takes any interest in anything but Garrett King's plays—oh, yes, and his love-letters—I've picked up your mantle," she informed her. "I do men good."

Janetta smiled.

"You'll have it all to yourself after next month. Gracious, you lucky wretch, not to have to scrabble for a place to put your beaux! Remember when Deb and Angela and Annice and I used to draw for first chance at the parlor?"

Angela laughed.

"I'm a staid old person these days, sweet children. I never scrabble any more, and I'm an aunt." For Deborah had an adorable pink baby with brown eyes.

"No more an aunt than Isabella," said Janetta. There was really little need for defending Angela, even to herself. She was one of the dearest girls in the world, but she was a born flirt, and was popularly supposed to have had first chance at the husbands of most of the young married women in town. She extended her field of conquest beyond Bentonburg, too, because she was becoming a well-known singer. When she sat down on the floor in the firelight she looked like a child of twelve. Even in daylight she looked as young as Isabella.

"There's a tail-feather or so left of the canary still," said Isabella, "but I'm delighted with your dear Max. He's gentle, teachable and obliging. The blonde in Lansing is going to bless my name."

But John, the experienced in the ways of women, shook his head.

"Well, I hope she does," he agreed, "but I don't trust you or any other girl the other side of a biscuit," he added ruthlessly.

The maker of muff-hounds smiled.

"You may trust me," she said with a certain air of grandeur. "And I just want you to notice Max at the Country Club dance next week. See if he isn't a changed man."

Max and Isabella both came to the dance with other people. Isabella had insisted that Max was far enough along now to choose someone else to practise on. He seemed to be getting on all right with the girl—she was not a blonde, by the way—indeed, getting on excellently. Isabella, having her accustomed good times with her accustomed many friends, found no chance to do more than smile at him. But about halfway through the evening a very surprising thing happened. Max apparently had been lying in wait for her, for directly in the middle of a most satisfactory dance he took her masterfully away from her partner. Calmly cut in, leaving the partner with a look of suffering.

"Max!" Isabella gasped when she found out

who was dancing with her, "what a surprising thing to do!"

"I couldn't help it," said Max doggedly, continuing to dance in perfect time as he talked. "I had to ask you something. I don't know what to say to that Bertha Annis girl."

"Won't she do any of the talking?" asked Isabella as they rounded a corner. "I thought it looked like it."

"She does," responded Max gloomily. By this time he had acquired a degree of fluency with Isabella. "But it's the way she talks—Good heavens, it's almost indecent!"

Isabella looked at Bertha, as she went past her, out of the corner of her eye. Bertha was very fluffy, and certainly giggled a good deal; but it required a stretch of imagination to think of her shocking anybody . . . even Max. Isabella was quite certain that it was safe to ask particulars.

"What did she talk about?" demanded Isabella.

"Love," replied Max, blushing hard. "Men that were in love with her. She told me about three. She gave me their names. She said what they said

when they—when they asked her. And then she'd round up, every five minutes, by explaining that she didn't talk this way to most people, but somehow she was sure I'd understand."

"And what did you answer?" asked Isabella.

"Answer?" he said despairingly. The dance was over by this time, but Max was not going to release his mentor. He manœuvred her into a secluded spot on the porch with all the adroitness of a professional love-pirate.

"I told her," he informed Isabella, "that I didn't think she ought to tell me such things."

His voice was severe. She looked at him thoughtfully.

"Well?" she asked.

"Well, somehow," said Max plaintively, "that seemed to block the conversation!"

"Oh, Max, Max! I should think it might!" she gasped, letting go and laughing as she had been wanting to laugh for the last five minutes.

Max remained silent and saddened.

"What on earth else was there to say?" he finally inquired.

Isabella dried her eyes and held up an admonitory finger.

"To begin with, there wasn't the least bit of reason for your being shocked at Bertha unless you disapprove of fairy-tales. Nine to one none of those stories had a bit of truth in them. You take girls too hard. And for goodness' sake, Max, when a girl asks you to understand, pretend you do. Look serious, and say 'I understand' in a gentle, grave voice, and you can get away with nearly anything. You don't have to *listen* to the Berthas"—Isabella's voice was scornful as she spoke of her confiding sisters—"but just be as understanding as if you were. Don't you see?"

Max sighed heavily.

"No, I don't see. It seems like a game."

Isabella beamed.

"That's just what it is. All you have to do is to play it."

He shook his head.

"I'm too stupid. I'll never learn."

"Oh, yes, you will," she encouraged him. "Now go back to Bertha and say to her in a rather soft,

quiet voice: 'You mustn't think I don't understand you,' and then a few words about how lovely you think it was of her to admit you to her confidence, or something of the sort. Remember it's a game. Now go on."

She gave him a little push. She was getting to have quite a proprietary feeling about Max.

"All right," he said with resignation. "It's the only way to get in right with Bertha, I can see that."

He evidently did manage to "get in right with Bertha," because a little later she saw them together. Max was bending his head and looking conscientiously devoted, and from her cheerful mien, Bertha was apparently relating the tale of the fourth rejected lover. And Isabella was nearly certain that as they swept past she heard Max murmuring realistically, "I understand!"

Max continued to come for his lessons with increasing regularity. Isabella wondered when he got time for the blonde in Lansing.

"You go and see other girls, don't you?" she

demanded of him when he turned up for the fourth time in one week.

"Oh, yes," he assured her. "I get along very decently with them. You're certainly splendid to take all this trouble for me, Isabella. You're—you're quite sure I'm not in the way?" It would never do to shatter Max's new-found assurance.

"Not a bit," she answered earnestly. "I enjoy every minute I'm with you, Max; you know that."

"Then let's take a trip off into the country," suggested Max promptly. "Put on that blue thing I like."

"You're doing well," she called back over her shoulder, laughing, as she ran in to find the blue silk sweater. As she slipped it on an astonishing thing occurred to her. When she had told Max that she enjoyed every minute of his society she had only spoken the truth! It occurred to her that it was curious.

"But it's all the better," she decided, as she came back again, ready for the tramp. "Think how bored I'd be if Max did bore me!" and marched off contentedly by his side. "Did you say things

were going well as regards other girls?" she asked casually as they strode along in perfect step together.

Max looked down at her with eyes that had lost their anxious look, and also their tortoise-shell spectacles. Isabella had bullied him into getting rimless glasses with a black ribbon, which looked most scholarly and intimate.

"Why, all right, I guess, Belle," he answered placidly. "Let's not talk about other people—let's just talk about us. What have you been doing?"

Isabella looked at him reproachfully.

"Et tu, Brute!" she said. "In other words, this from you, Max! I don't think it's fair to practise on me *all* the time."

Max looked reproachfully at her in his turn, through the becoming ribboned glasses. Then he gave them a jerk and let them dangle.

"Everlasting nuisance, these things are," he commented. "And I wasn't practising on you a bit. Don't you suppose I have any interest in you at all? Can't I even ask you what you are doing without having you accuse me of saying things for effect? Hang it, a man has some human feelings!"

From Max—Max the erstwhile Deprecating Icicle—this was indeed an outburst. Isabella remembered that he *had* very sensitive feelings and made a mental note not to remind him any more when he was practising. He spent the rest of their walk talking to her about herself (and somewhat about himself) and she did not remind him again. It had been an excellent start for a quarrel.

About that time it came to Isabella that it would be a good idea if she went away for a visit. Just why flight seemed the only answer to things—especially as she was not aware, so far as she knew, that there were things—she couldn't exactly explain to herself. Flight appealed to her, nevertheless, and she went.

The last sacrifice to matrimony in the Goldsborough family had been Worrell, and he and Florence lived near Philadelphia, in one of the pleasantest of Main Line suburbs. Isabella and Florence had always got on well together, and the Worrells had been wanting Belle to come and stay with them for months. Florence greeted her with rapture, and Worrell with placid cordiality—Worrell

was not demonstrative. Florrie was not long enough married to be in the state which young married women complacently explain when they invite girls, as "having lost sight of young men," and Worrell seemed to find her ways with them admirable, so long as she put him as whole-heartedly first as she did. Having plenty in her quiver, she spread them at Isabella's feet.

After she had been a day and a half at Florrie's house the reason why Isabella had fled from home came out of its hole and stared at its owner. *She missed Max.* She missed him dreadfully.

"It's only that you get sort of attached to anything you train," she assured herself, and went forth and was charming to the very agreeable and fluent men whom Florrie had massed in honor of her coming. But none of them was so agreeable or so fluent as to put Max out of her mind—Max's honest blue eyes and halting, straightforward speech —Max's late-learned gay friendliness and the little affectionate, intimate talks that always had the sting in their tails of being "practice." She shook herself impatiently as the thought of Max clung closer and

closer. She went and took extra baths at odd times with a vague idea of washing it off, even. But by the third day of her association with men, men whose society was as flavorless as sawdust, she capitulated and owned up to herself. Isabella was an honest young person. The terrible fact was that she had fallen in love with Max.

"And Max," she reminded herself severely, "has simply been frankly practising on me because of that blonde in Lansing. He's doubtless patting her horrid blonde hand this minute, and telling her he understands. And I suppose she thinks he means it. . . . And he likely does. And I've only myself to blame. I suppose he'll come dashing up to tell me all about her when I get back. I wish I never had to go back. Oh, dear, it seems as if it would be years before then!"

Florrie found her staring out of the window at odd moments, and noted that the intentioned devotion of her most attractive offering moved Isabella not at all.

"Worrell," she said, "that girl's in love."

Worrell had a brother's disbelief in the possi-

bility of such a thing. But Florrie didn't urge further when her sister-in-law's week was up. Florrie was a most comprehending person.

Time and the hour wear out the weariest day, and finally Isabella did return. And promptly Max called up and said he was coming over. There was a joyous note in his voice that Isabella, in a less chastened day, might have taken for pleasure in her return. As things were she didn't know whether it was because he had become engaged to the blonde in Lansing, or because he had learned even more charming but false manners in her absence.

He came up the steps as gayly as he'd talked over the telephone, and took both her hands tight.

"Good heavens, Isabella, I thought you'd never get back!" he cried, and seemed quite to forget that he had her hands.

"I thought so too," said Isabella forgetfully; and then pulled herself up and took away her hands and sat down.

"Are you really glad to see me again, Belle?" he asked, and his voice softened caressingly.

"Very glad," said Isabella coldly. She had fixed

her eyes on the portrait of Aunt Clementina hanging on the farthest wall.

"Isabella, what's the matter? Did you get engaged or something while you were away? What have I done?"

Isabella felt that she'd stood about enough, and she came indiscreetly out into the open.

"Max Warner, there's nothing at all the matter. And supposing I was engaged to forty men at Florrie's? What on earth does it matter to you, with that blonde in Lansing that you practise affectionate speeches on me for?"

Max stared at her.

"Blonde in Lansing?" he repeated. "But there isn't any blonde in Lansing. At least, I don't know any especially well. And I wish you'd stop turning off everything I say to you by calling it practising. It isn't kind. You know it isn't easy for me to talk to you ever, Belle, and you know why. But it isn't like the kind of girl you are to go on fencing forever."

"What do you mean?" gasped Isabella. "John *said* there was a blonde in Lansing."

"Well, he ought to know," Max retorted exasperatedly. "He goes over to see a Lansing girl four nights out of five—and by Jove, she is a blonde. Is that where you got it?"

Isabella almost bounded from her chair.

"The wretch! The—why, Max, he's engaged to Carolyn Landon!"

Max shook his head.

"He and Carolyn finished things up—let me see—just a little after that first time you called me up; remember? He told me a little about it—I didn't get the rights of it, but I think Carolyn was pretty bossy."

Isabella nearly forgot her own sorrows in this delectable news. The family had not thought Caro would make John happy, for John was very mid-Victorian, and Carolyn was late-Pankhurstian.

"Oh, oh! I'm *so* glad!" she sighed. "Max, you darling—— But—but John *said*——"

She came back to her own affairs with a rush. "Wasn't it your blonde?"

"I'll settle with old John when I get hold of him," Max growled. "He knows perfectly well

whose blonde she is. And he knows, too, why I never could speak to you like a human being. I always got on as well with other girls as I needed."

"Why—why couldn't you?" she asked almost in a whisper. She almost knew the answer; and Max certainly wasn't purring at all in a muff-hound manner—and yet——

"Because I've been in love with you for a year," Max said bluntly. "Do you suppose I'd have let you trail me round on the end of a string if I hadn't been?"

"Oh, Max!" gasped Isabella, and dropped her head on the chair-arm and began to cry.

It was dark enough for seclusion. Max had his arms round her in a moment.

"There, dear, don't cry about it," he whispered, patting her comfortingly.

"I'm so foolish—I'm such an idiot——" gulped Isabella.

"Never mind, darling," Max soothed her. "I understand!"

Isabella pulled herself upright in his arms.

"Max, I love you to death, and I know I'm going to have a perfectly splendid time married to you—but if you ever tell me you understand again as long as you live, I'll go and drown myself in the lake!"

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

It turned out to be quite true that John and Carolyn had parted forever. The bride-not-to-be had gone on a lecture tour, cool and certain of the eternal verities as ever; and John would say very little about it to his sisters and brothers. They thought he took it rather hard, for John was a warm-hearted person, and had tried very hard to pretend that his lady-love was the sort of person he wanted her to be. It was doubly hard on him, just then, that his twin and special sister should marry and go to California, but, as he told her when she lamented the parting, it was the fortune of war.

Janetta was married, very quietly, and went off with her Garrett, who proved (for the family had seen very little of him) not at all their idea of a playwright. He was upstanding and breezy, and dressed and talked much more like a business man than the gentle-mannered Pennsylvanian Golds-

boroughs, who *were*. Altogether they liked him as much as they could anyone who took Jan away, as far as California. Deborah lived in the South, but somehow that seemed so much more next door! She and her baby came up for the wedding; Gray could not get away. Janetta explained to her family that they must regard Deborah as a softening of the blow.

It was just when the family had returned from the station, where they had been seeing Janetta and Garrett off, that Isabella fired her bombshell.

"Max and I think we'll be married in about a month," she said sweetly.

She explained afterward to horrified Annice that she had done it to divert the family's attention from their grief. If this was the case she made a great success.

"My dear child, you are too young!" protested her mother. But protests had never availed with Isabella.

"Only a year younger than Deborah was, and a year older than you were!" said Isabella serenely. "Besides, Max wants me to."

A shout of laughter went up from the bereaved family. It was the first time in the history of young Isabella's life that anybody's wanting her to do anything had had such an effect.

John, looking not at all sorrowful (the family rather suspected by now that he liked the girl in Lansing enough to have forgotten his griefs), eyed Isabella with interest. "You truly love him, Belle," he said. "That's plain to be seen."

Belle blushed scarlet down to the back of her pretty neck.

"That's just the sort of nasty thing you say!" she told him defiantly, while Max himself, who was sitting by John smoking a cigarette in a methodical manner, laughed as much as John did.

"Let me defend her, Jack," he interposed, not at all ruffled. "It isn't that she loves me. It's my brutal ways with her. Isn't it, Belle?"

"Deborah," said Isabella, getting up from the couch where she had been curled with Deborah on one side of her and Annice on the other. "I hear your baby crying."

And she left with much dignity, while Deborah,

the mother of the baby, remained nonchalantly where she was, stretching her slim length out with a little relief on the spot Isabella had left vacant. The baby hadn't been crying at all.

Deborah had been away three years, with only one visit home, and she didn't know much about Max. She wondered what he really was like. What she saw was a good-looking, quiet, blond young man of exceeding tidiness, who gave the impression of being Isabella's slave. She also wondered why he and John came to be chums, and hoped that he wouldn't be too helplessly under the thumb of her reckless youngest sister. Deborah's own married life was ideal. She and Gray usually wanted the same things at the same time and did them—or had them—in complete amity. Indeed, their principal effort was to conceal how much in love with each other they were after three years of matrimony.

Annice, who saw her eyes following Isabella's vanishing skirts, bent her smooth brown head and whispered to her elder sister.

"It's quite true," said Annice soberly. "She

does do everything Max tells her. But I don't think it's bad for her. Arnold says that a man she could have ruled would have ruined her."

Arnold and Annice were a little old-fashioned in their ideas, and Deborah felt doubtful. However, she remembered Arnold Salter's steady, practical good sense, and was consoled.

In the remaining days of her visit she discovered that it was true, and that, moreover, it was an excellent thing for Isabella. So, in spite of Gray's wails of loneliness she and her small son stayed on till the next wedding; and then Gray, who could stand life without her no longer, came and got her, and they were mistaken at the West Philadelphia Station for the bride and groom, until the baby's nurse followed them down the passage to the southern division, instead of remaining with Annice and Arnold, who had an unmistakably married look of long standing.

After that, Isabella and Max came back from their honeymoon and settled down in the same Main Line town with Worrell and Florrie, which was more convenient for business purposes than little

Bentonburg. And as far as anybody knew they lived happily ever after for a year.

Isabella concentrated her energies, the Worrell Goldsboroughs were delighted to see, on getting Max ahead, and on having as good a time in her new home as she had had in the old. Like most women she made discoveries about her husband that were truly surprising.

"The one that gratifies me most," she told Florrie, her nearest chance at a confidant, "is that Max is as untidy as he can be, apart from being personally neat. I was *so* afraid he'd be a fuss!"

"Worrell's much neater than I am, but he isn't a fuss," said Florrie a little defensively.

"Oh, well, Worrell always was as steady as Father Time," said his sister carelessly. "He and Annice were alike in that. But I'm learning to be tidy—have to pick up so much after Max. Oh, good gracious, look at that clock! And I'm expecting the Gorhams to-night!"

"The Gorhams!" said Florrie with interest. "You never told us that. I thought it was just the Regises and us."

"I wanted to spring it on you!" said Isabella gayly. "But it's the Gorhams themselves, the great Gorhams. I must go home now and torment Emma some more. I wish she didn't lose her head so."

But Emma, the maid, proved to be rising gallantly to the occasion, and Isabella went on with her household duties with a light heart. There was another apprehension in her mind that she hadn't mentioned to her sister-in-law. Only time and Max could free her from that.

Max came home from business early, as he had promised her he would, and made a dive for the bedroom.

"You've heaps of time," said Isabella.

She perched on the side of the bathtub, and, from ancient habit, held converse with her husband while he shaved. Unlike most men, he preferred it.

"There'll be just six here besides us," she said. "The Worrells and the Regises and the Gorhams. And dinner's at eight instead of seven-fifteen, so you don't need to hurry . . . Max! Angel-

child, you've used your bath-towel on your shoes—— The marks of your crime will never come off!"

Max stopped operations around a critical corner to grin.

"The shoes looked all right after I'd used the towel," he said with slow, cheerful impenitence.

Isabella tilted herself backward in her dark red gown, on the edge of the tub, and they both laughed. They had not yet reached the place where they took married life as being "'unco' full o' sairiousness." To them both Max's illicit use of the bath-towel was a very good joke.

But when Isabella spoke again it was not gayly. Indeed, it was with a certain wistfulness—for Isabella hated speaking to Max about things. She didn't look at him while she spoke, but at the glass towel-rack.

"Max, these Gorhams who are coming to dinner to-night are such *aw*fully correct people—would you try to remember not to shuffle your feet back and forth when you get to talking?"

Max, at the critical angle which necessitated

making a face, didn't answer for the moment. When he released himself he nodded briefly.

"M'hm," he assented, as one wishing to get a reply over and done with. "I won't. . . . Belle, did my clean collars come home from the laundry? I'll have to run out and *buy* one if they haven't."

"There's a big roll of clean collars in your collar-box," Isabella answered, getting up and crossing into their bedroom to look.

"They're no good—the wrong shape," called he patiently from the depths of a towel. "See if you can't run down the clean ones."

Isabella always allowed herself an extra half-hour after dressing herself in which to help Max find collars, socks, studs, scarf-clasps and such other things as had wilfully escaped him. She discovered the collars from the laundry on the victrola, where black Emma had put them, and carried them in triumph to her lord and master.

When he was almost dressed she spoke to him again; this time from the door, on her way to give the table a last inspection.

"Max, *please* try to remember not to do that

queer little thing with your feet to-night. It—it makes you look so—undignified."

"Feet? What feet?" Max asked absent-mindedly as he slapped at his hair with two military brushes. "Belle, I believe my hair's getting thin. Heard of an awfully good tonic from a fellow downtown to-day."

"*Your* feet, you silly person," she answered, half-laughing. She was a gracious picture as she leaned against the door in her scarlet, and Max, suspending his brushes, thought as much and said so.

"You're certainly good-looking to-night, Belle. Where'd you get the dress?"

"Why, I've had it ages," Isabella answered, duly pleased but not to be deflected. "Don't you remember last spring, you said why hadn't I had a red frock, and I went and got this? But, Max, you didn't promise me very attentively. And you know when you get interested and excited you *do* move your feet!"

"I know you *say* I do," began Max doggedly; but, moved by Isabella's evident earnestness, ended, "All right, Belle, I'll watch and not do it once."

Still she hovered, not quite convinced.

"You'll be sure to remember?"

"Sure," said Max, with absent-minded intentness. He was wrestling with his last stud.

Isabella, her mind at rest provisionally, flitted out to be sure that the candles were quite right, and that Emma had read, marked and inwardly digested the menu written out in a round hand and pinned over the sink. She *did* want to make a good impression on the Gorhams. They were more of an older generation, but they stood for the very best and pleasantest in the pretty suburb. Besides that, Mr. Gorham could, she knew, help Max in a business way, if he once came to know him well and like him. To be sure, men always did like Max. . . . But she wanted them, and their wives, to admire him unreservedly, too. . . . Well, he'd promised not to do it. The trick was getting on her nerves a little, she decided, when it could worry her so much more than his good qualities pleased her—and she decided not to let it.

It was to be as successful a dinner as exactly the right amount of attention to details and forgetful-

ness of worry-things would make it. The chrysanthemums on the table led up in just the right way to Isabella's dull-red frock and the dull-red and buff of the decorations of the dining-room. And Emma seemed unusually quick to grasp the point of things. Altogether, Isabella decided that she could toss care to the winds and have a good time, her own party though it might be.

The Gorhams and the Worrell Goldsboroughs arrived together on the dot of eight-ten; the last couple, Mary Regis and her brother Alfred, a little later. Max, as immaculate as if no wake of coats and collars had marked his footsteps, welcomed them with the brief pleasantness which, without much effort, always seemed to make people like him. She, herself, flitted about the room gayly talking to them all till Emma announced dinner, so attractive and carefree a young thing that the Gorhams smiled a little benignly to each other, as over children playing house.

The dinner itself went off delightfully, and nothing but the deepening flush on Isabella's cheeks betrayed that anywhere was any effort or watchful-

ness. It all seemed properly like an impromptu, the carefully planned courses and the effortless talk had a gay air of being something used every day. Isabella grew happier and happier. Everything was going to be right! Even to the coffee, served without a reminder by the spotless Emma, in the living-room, everything was perfect. Mary Regis's singing was, and so was the drifting butterfly dance that Isabella was to do for the Roumanian Relief Fair, and was showing her guests privately beforehand. As her skirts fluttered in her lifted white hands her eyes fell on Max. He was off duty, for Alfred Regis, a dark, alert, helpful young man who liked doing things for his hostess, was attending the victrola. And as Isabella's vivid lips and eyes smiled, and as she swayed slowly till she drifted to the floor and rested there a moment, a poised red butterfly, she saw Max smile happily and *shuffle his feet.*

They were well-shaped, good-sized feet, shiningly clad in patent leather, and they moved slowly toward each other and as slowly and contentedly away and back, in something known to Max's childhood as

the ghost-waggle. It had been a cherished accomplishment in his boyhood days. How it had become rooted in his subconsciousness, to reappear still in his more joyful moments as automatically as a cat's purr, who shall say? But there it was, and there Isabella, agonized, saw it. And she was sure the Gorhams saw it, too. At least, only a moment afterward Mrs. Gorham suggested going home, with a gentle precision which sent to Isabella's despairing young heart the certainty that the lady disapproved of *something*. Isabella had been working too hard over that Roumanian Relief, anyway, and life looked much too significant to her. And the responsibility of running life all by herself, at nineteen, instead of being the careless youngest in a large family, much as she liked it, was a little harder on her than she knew.

She bade her guests a gay good-night, but with a heavy place in her heart. Max had taken the pleasure out of it all for her. As for Max, genuinely happy after a very pleasant little evening, he came up behind her when the last guest was gone, where she stood wearily, and patted her shoulder.

"Good little hostess," he said approvingly, looking down on tall Isabella. "Fine dinner straight through, kiddie. If your Gorhams didn't go home well-fed and pleased it wasn't the fault of Mr. and Mrs. Warner."

This was too much. When all he'd done towards making the evening pleasant was to break his promise about shuffling his feet! Isabella shook off the affectionate hand and accused him angrily.

"You broke your promise! You shuffled your feet right before the Gorhams—and I did so want them to like us—it's what you *have* to have out here—and Mrs. Gorham looked shocked, and took Mr. Gorham off directly. You *know* you did, and she did. And you promised solemnly. And you know how I hate it, and how foolish and ridiculous it looks and what bad manners it is. You *know*——"

Max, chilled and rebuffed at an affectionate moment, permitted his very bad, but usually well-disciplined temper to peep out of its chains.

"I know perfectly well that you're making a ridiculous fuss about nothing at all, and that you've

been nagging the life out of me for months about that shuffling, as you call it. If it's such a blight on my character and morals and manners and tolerance by the human race as you seem to believe, I wonder you married me."

"I can't explain it. We all do foolish things at times," Isabella answered, icily if rudely.

There was nobody to shake either of them. So they put out the lights and went to bed in a black hateful silence that hurt them both worse than ages of quarreling.

They were distantly courteous to each other over the breakfast table and still courteous when Max came home in the evening; until about nine, when impulsive Isabella couldn't stand it any longer, and said she was sorry. And Max said he was sorry, and she promised not to get overtired and fly up, and he promised not to do anything that annoyed her, no matter how trivial it seemed to him. At which, Isabella started to explain how a thing which made him ridiculous in other people's eyes wasn't trivial, and checked herself rather than disturb the pleasant peace hovering over the landscape.

And life flowed on till the day of the Roumanian Relief Bazaar, for which the Country Club had been working itself to death these two months past.

Part of it was a vaudeville entertainment—home talent—and Isabella's butterfly dance was nearing its turn. The big stage of the clubhouse lecture-room was full of palms, and a carefully simple "set" by one of the young women who knew a good deal about Bakst gave an effect that should have made any Roumanian sufferer glad he was not having an extra pang on account of it. On the stage, the funniest short-story writer of the day, who happened by great good luck to be a townsman, was reading his funniest story. Isabella, lurking at the wings in her gauzy brown-and-yellow costume, was listening absorbedly, as were the other girls and women crowded around her; coming performers all, and friends. She herself was wrapped in an old cloak and curled unrecognizably on the floor, a figure easy to overlook. Absorbed in the story, she had forgotten everything else, till she heard a giggle from Ethel Taylor, behind her.

"Dorothy, *do* look at Max Warner, there in the

front row!" Ethel was whispering to the girl beside her. "Look at his feet—isn't that the funniest thing you ever saw? What do you suppose he thinks he's doing?"

"Walking in his sleep, maybe," whispered back the other girl—Dorothy Page, a girl Isabella had always thought was such a dear!

Isabella could not see Max herself from where she was coiled. She did not need to. She very well knew what hateful little trick he was performing.

For one white-hot moment she hated the two girls behind and above her so much that she wanted to kill them, to jump up and denounce them, to ruin their several happinesses forever. Then it slipped away from her—Isabella was never a good hater, or a sustained one. After all, if they saw a man doing something ridiculous they had no reason for not being amused. Of course, if you were married to a man who made himself ridiculous, it was a little difficult to see the amusing side of it. . . . And then it was time for her dance.

She went through it very beautifully, and took

an encore. Then she said she was tired and wanted to go home.

She slipped away without Max and went home in the Gorhams' car, just then driving that lady back early in order to look after the youngest baby, left alone, with only two nurses, too long already. She talked easily and pleasantly to Mrs. Gorham about babies and bazaars and cabbages and kings; and made smiling exit into her own house.

There alone she sat down on the living-room couch, a tragic heap in her gauzes, and stared ahead of her.

"When Max comes home it will be all right," she thought. "I'll love him again then, and not feel this hateful way I do now about him—as if he were somebody outside who didn't matter."

She waited for him, still with that dulled it-doesn't-matter feeling, but with an anguished hoping under it that Max would hurry up—hurry up and come home and make her feel the right way toward him, and see that feet and what you did with them didn't matter a bit.

He came in about twelve, when the thing was done for the evening, cheerful and yawning.

"Still up, kiddie?" he called. "Aren't you tired? I thought you'd have been in bed long ago."

"Oh, no," said Isabella, getting up and coming toward him smiling and stately. "I'm not in the least tired. Do you want me to get you something to eat?"

"Well, I wish you would," he answered, dropping his overcoat and scarf on one chair and his hat on another, and flinging his own long length across a third—his pet chair. "Queer, I *am* tired—and all I've been doing is listening."

Isabella went out and moved about the kitchen arranging a little supper on a tray. She felt perfectly well—perfectly sane and poised—but Max still didn't matter. He didn't matter a bit.

"What shall I do about it?" Isabella asked herself as she spread triangles of bread with salad-dressing. "What shall I do to make him into a real person again?"

Then she bethought herself that she was very tired, and that when she was rested everything

would straighten out and be pleasant and sunny again. . . . *If only he did not shuffle his feet—not once more.* . . .

Max liked Isabella's sandwiches and cocoa very much, always. They sat down across from each other, as they so often did, making a picnic-frolic of their before-bed meal . . . and still Max did not matter at all. Isabella went on being just as nice as if he did. She hoped he would again, soon. . . . She was sure he would . . . why, a world without a Max that mattered in it—it was unthinkable! *"If he only won't shuffle his feet,"* said a weary voice somewhere down far inside of her.

And they went to bed, and they got up. And Isabella thought perhaps it would wear off. And Max sat down for a minute before he went to the office to tell her some good news of a fine investment that he thought was coming his way—*and he shuffled his feet.*

She did not say anything or do anything. What was the use?—she'd nagged him long enough. She kissed him good-by, and went back and gave Emma

orders for luncheon, and sat down on the couch in the same place, and thought about it. The longer she thought the more unbearable—quietly, inevitably unbearable—it became. But she waited another day, to be sure. Then—having kissed Max good-by sweetly, and given orders for luncheon once more—she methodically packed her trunk and her suit-case, methodically set the rooms to rights and laid Max's things out where he could most easily find them, and wrote him an explanatory note and went away.

She would go on with her fancy-dancing. She might even take up her old and cherished plan of going into the films—she was a married woman now, and her people couldn't object, as they had always done. John would be cross, he was so fond of Max, but the only person Isabella had ever obeyed except her mother was Max himself, and she didn't propose to let John count. There was only Angela at home now of the girls, and they would be only too glad to have her again. As to not having made a success of her married life, if she held her head high enough and had a good

enough time nobody would say much that was pitying.

Max could let the house and go board with Florrie. The whole family was fond of Max. Worrell might even take Max's part. . . . Well, Isabella hoped he would, if that would make things pleasanter for Max. She felt impersonally sorry for Max; he would miss her.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

She walked collectedly into the old house she had left a year before, and kissed her delighted mother and sister.

"You darling to turn up!" said Angela. "You've come at just the right time, for there's a set of concerts I simply can't postpone giving down in Delaware, and I'd been worrying about leaving Mother with only a couple of boys and Father. Of course, Annice comes in every morning, but that isn't the same."

Isabella looked at her oldest sister dully. She felt ages older than little yellow-haired Angela. Angela, who had always kept a firm if loving little hand on the four sisters below her, suddenly seemed to nineteen-year-old Belle like someone who knew nothing whatever of life.

"Have a good time on the tour and bring home the usual number of scalps!" she told her affectionately.

Angela laughed. "To please you, dear. How's Max?"

"Just the same," said Isabella. There wasn't time to go into it now. There would be all the time there was—years upon years.

"I'll just have time to round up my belongings," said Angela. "Telephone for a taxi to the station, won't you, Belle, please?"

It felt exactly like being back home, the youngest sister; and yet, as Belle went to the telephone, that queer dual consciousness of being the grown-up and responsible Mrs. Warner of Aberystwyth came back to her. Mrs. Warner had got out of the way of doing errands for older sisters.

She saw Angela affectionately off; Angela as absurdly like a doll on its travels as ever——

Then she broke down, just inside the door, quite unexpectedly.

"I can't go back! Oh, Mother, I know you'll think I'm crazy, but I *can't!* If Max——"

Mrs. Goldsborough, who was very wise, patted her daughter softly. You might almost have

thought she was prepared for this behavior on Belle's part.

"You shan't," she said caressingly. "There isn't a reason on earth why you should. Now, tell Mother all about it."

Isabella came into the old dining-room and began to explain more collectedly, mechanically stroking one of the setters as she talked.

"It'll be only till I've turned round, Mother. I can go into the movies—you know I've had offers to. But I'd like to stay here a few weeks, if you and Father don't mind, and don't say noble things about my duty being to live with my husband. Because it isn't. I'm a human being—I've a right not to go mad."

Mrs. Goldsborough, still being very wise, asked no questions.

"You're too tired and nervous to talk about it at all," she observed. "That is, unless you want to. I shouldn't say anything to your father tonight, if I were you. Because, you know, Belle, he certainly will take that view. Let's call it a visit—shall we?—till you're a little rested up."

"Oh, Mother, you're an angel to take me this way, sight unseen," said Isabella gratefully. "Can I have my own room?"

"Why, of course you may," said her mother, and they went up to it.

Isabella, left alone, dropped on the familiar bed and lay there with her eyes shut. She *was* very tired, and she knew she must rest, because she had a struggle ahead of her with Max. And Max had the will of a mule. He would come after her, of course, the next day, when he had her letter. She was sorry to put him to all that trouble—all that useless trouble. For nothing would change her . . . but she wanted to sleep first. She was very tired, and sleep was not hard to come by.

"Dinner's ready, Belle dear!" was the first thing she knew after that.

She hurriedly washed the sleep from her eyes, and ran downstairs, almost light-hearted. Her father was as glad to see her as her mother had been, and took her presence as much for granted. He asked after Max, as he naturally would, and

Isabella replied the mechanical things she would have said spontaneously a week before. It was not hard. She felt already as if Max were over and done with; indeed, as if everything but a desire to rest and not to have anything on her mind were over and done with, too. She dropped eagerly into the home routine as if she had never been away, sitting in her old place between John and Sandy at the shrunken dinner table, and dropping into her own green chair at the other side of the little sewing-place where her mother was wont to spend her evenings now. She found herself running up to her mother's room, as she had used to do, to collect collars that needed freshening and fichus that needed a stitch. Her mother was a bit untidy in a picturesque way, and Isabella had always guarded her collars from the tongues of Bentonburg like a dragon.

"I think the boys and I have missed you more than we did Deborah or even Janetta, Belle."

"She always made more noise than they did," said John in a brotherly fashion.

She tried to answer him defiantly in their old gay

way, but it was an effort, and she was glad when he went off. The blonde in Lansing was a fact accomplished now; and great was the rejoicing in the family, for she fitted into it adorably, and was willing to come back to the old house. Her name was Elizabeth Julian, and she was exactly the Goldsborough kind of person.

Isabella was glad when her mother put her in possession of these facts, and some other bits of family gossip that had been left out of the letters. But she still felt curiously out of it all. She reminded herself how tired she was.

"Oh, dear me, Mother, how did you ever get along without me?" she demanded, half-smiling, over her lapful of fluffy work.

"My wardrobe has certainly missed you," her mother acknowledged, smiling back.

"We've missed you more than that," her father added unexpectedly from behind his paper. "You don't seem so on tiptoe for a flight as usual, since your marriage, Belle—more our little girl come home."

Why did dear, obtuse men have to say unex-

pectedly insighted things? she wondered. She wished he hadn't.

But " It's the mending," she answered gayly, and then she rose and came over and stood behind him, her cheek bent down to the top of his head. " And oh, Father, it's good to be home! "

" It's good to have you, daughter," he answered. " It's lonely since you all married."

Isabella went back to her work, feeling warmly, comfortably sanctioned. After all, it was home. . . .

Next morning, which should have brought repentance—Isabella was afraid when she went to sleep, that it would—didn't. She wakened, still feeling as if her year with Max had been incidental. She dressed at her old mirror with a comfortable feeling of being able to take all the time she liked; and had her morning bath in unhurried peace. She had to snatch it in the afternoon at her own house, because there wasn't time for hers and Max's both unless someone rose uncomfortably early. She really liked two a day, and she realized now that she had been making a little sacrifice.

Her father went out to business about nine. Isabella and her mother were left alone in the sunny, shabby old living-room. Isabella dropped again into her pet chair, a worn, enormous thing, fatly upholstered and so delightfully broken-springed that it fitted every nook of your frame. She smiled up from it at her mother.

"Oh, it is nice here," she said luxuriously. "And it's *so* nice to have a vacation from being a wife!"

Her mother, understanding and loving as she was, did not like this.

"Suppose you tell me how you earned your vacation, Isabella," she replied quietly.

So Isabella, leaning forward with her hands clasped before her and her brown eyes childishly wide, told passionately.

"I suppose you'll think I'm insane," she said. "I can't stand Max any longer, that's all. I'll go wild if I have to. I've tried and tried not to mind, and tried to say it wasn't anything—and it *isn't* anything—to tell. But it *is*—to stand. Mother, it's just—a trick he has. Just a little silly, tiny, gro-

tesque trick that doesn't seem like anything. But it's got on my nerves till it seems as if it was all he ever did or ever was—why, it's all there is *to* him when I think of him! I'm obsessed by it. . . . And it *is* important. It would kill me if I had to live with it any longer. It's sickened me of Max, bored me with him—— Oh, I can see how fine he is in every way still, of course. But his good qualities don't make any more personal appeal to me than George Washington's."

She stopped. She didn't at all expect her mother to see it her way. But her mother seemed still to be suspending judgment, and to be kind.

"What is the trick?" she asked. "Max has always seemed dignified enough to me, if not too much so."

Isabella replied listlessly. She was tired of thinking about it.

"He shuffles his feet when he's pleased or excited," she said. "It makes him ridiculous. Nothing I can say makes him stop it, or admit he's doing it even, as far as I can see. And I simply can't stand it another day! Nothing I can say does any

good!" she concluded defiantly, as if to forestall what her mother was going to say.

"It isn't as large as it seems," said her mother temperately and provokingly. "Every man has something that drives his wife mad. Don't you know how Caro worried at John for sticking out his tongue when he was very tired and nervous, and had made a joke?"

"She hadn't any business to," said Isabella a little severely. "Besides, we broke him of it ages ago—and Caro wasn't his wife, and she's over and done with!"

"It likely worried her," said her mother patiently.

"I suppose so," Isabella acknowledged reluctantly, "but such a little——" she stopped and laughed at herself, ruefully. "Maybe it was what they came to the breaking-point about, after all. Oh, Mother, *I* have! That's all there is to it. If you'd ever had anything like that to go through with yourself——"

"I have," said her mother unexpectedly. "My dear Isabella, for twenty-nine years your father has

flourished his handkerchief like a man out of Thackeray, every time he has been about to use it. And there are times when I've thought I'd die if he did it once more."

Isabella gasped. Her mother! Why—why, Father and Mother adored each other. They were restless away from each other for more than two or three hours at a time. They——

"Father!" said Isabella. "Why—why, it's just a darling funny old trick, one of the most lovable things he does. It's just a part of Father."

"But he wasn't always just Father," said her mother wistfully. "He was my lover first, dear. I didn't like his doing it."

A light broke on Isabella. Why, no! He wasn't just Father, after all. He was a man, too. And Mother—she wasn't just Mother. She was a woman. And she didn't want her man to do little awful things for the world to smile at, either. . . . Isabella leaned impulsively over and kissed her mother, on an equality.

"Oh, you poor dear!" she spoke, half-laughing, half-crying. Then she sat up and remembered that

here, if ever, was her chance to get the answer. For her mother had evidently got so it was all right, anyway.

"Tell me one thing," she asked eagerly. "How did you get so it didn't matter?"

But her mother looked perplexed.

"I don't know," she said. "There are times now when it bothers me a little, just because it used to, I expect. But don't you know how it is? After a while you *don't* mind things much, after all."

Isabella lay back in the chair silently a minute to think. So that was how it was—the unsatisfactory use-and-wont attrition of the years!

"I suppose Father's got so he's a pattern on the wall-paper to you," she said passionately. "I *couldn't* get that way with Max!"

"Oh, no, dear," her mother answered gently. "Not like that at all. You know better."

No . . . they were not like that. But that was all the help her mother could give her.

"I suppose," she said musingly, "that the perfect ladies and perfect devils women go wild over, and men think them such fools for being wild over,

have that score over just husband-men. They always remember to be picturesque and dignified before people, as women have to—to keep always in the picture."

"They aren't good to their wives, that kind," said her mother. "You know that."

"I don't care!" said Isabella passionately again. "I'd rather a man threw me downstairs in private than drove me mad and mortified me!"

"Yes, dear," acquiesced her mother, pushing back a lock of her brown hair with a characteristic gesture. "Yes, I expect you do feel that way. Only you don't really."

Isabella sat up angrily.

"Then you think I should go back? Because I'm not going to, that's all. If you don't want me here I can stay at Nan's."

"My dear little girl," said her mother, "I want you for just as long as you want to stay. . . . I suppose you know Max will probably follow you when he has your note?"

"Oh, yes," Isabella answered indifferently. "I've timed him for about eleven this morning. That's

the train he'd likely take—you know the service is bad. Don't worry—there won't be any scene."

"Then he'll be here in a minute," said her mother, ignoring the scene suggestion.

"I know it," said Isabella, and leaned back after that to wait silently and unemotionally till he arrived.

There was no scene.

Max came in very quietly, and spoke to his mother-in-law exactly as usual, also to Isabella. Mrs. Goldsborough slipped out after that, and left Max confronting Isabella, who lay back in the chair and looked at him quietly. He stood and looked back for a moment. He looked tired and white. He did not seem to know what to say.

"Isabella, I'm sorry—I didn't know how you felt——" he began haltingly. Then he came over to her, and snatched her into his arms as if it were the only thing he could do.

"Oh, Isabella!" he said brokenly. "Isabella darling!"

Isabella sat stiffly under it for a moment, unresponsive. Then suddenly things came back into

focus amazingly, terrifyingly. Why, this was Max —this was her husband that belonged to her and she to him. Why . . . how silly she'd been!— Why, those things didn't matter after all.

She found the age-old words of woman taking the quickest way out with a man coming to her lips soothingly and automatically.

"I was so tired and so nervous," she said. "And I'm so glad you came!"

Max held her as if he were afraid she would fade.

"Then you'll forgive me, if I did make a fool of myself before people, and you'll come back?" he asked her gently. Max loved his wife very much.

"Oh, yes," said Isabella. There wasn't anything else to do. . . . And yet it felt unfair, improperly ended, unsatisfactory, somehow. But she had to go back. There was nothing else she wanted to do.

"We might as well stay the day," said Max, taking things for granted and pulling her over on the sofa, where he could keep his arm around her. He seemed a little afraid she would fly off, still.

"I'll never do it again," he vowed. "Never. Why, you poor dear foolish little angel . . . how on earth could I tell a little thing like that mattered so much to you? If I'd known it worried you I'd have stopped ages ago . . . why didn't you *tell* me?"

"I did," said Isabella in a subdued voice.

"Well, not so I understood it mattered," said he in all good faith.

"I—I couldn't without making too much fuss over it," said Isabella, she felt inadequately. But there is no such thing in the world, of course, as adequate explanation, more especially between men and women, most especially between a man and his wife.

She cuddled herself close to his shoulder luxuriously, and noted that he would have to be bought a new necktie presently. She liked buying him ties. She looked off into the distance with a little rapt smile, because it was going to be very nice, after all, to buy Max things again.

Max looked down at her apprehensively because of the silence. Then, seeing the smile, he kissed

her—a little warily still, as one not yet sure of his bird.

"Poor little tired girl," he said affectionately. "Such a tempest in a teapot!"

Isabella rubbed her cheek against his shoulder—that broad blue-serge shoulder that had been hers so long now.

"It *was* rather a tempest in a teapot," her more sensible side admitted. But, said the wilful small girl of her that no woman ever quite outgrows, if it had broken Max of that hateful habit she was glad. . . .

A gentle movement of the knee nearest hers made her look down. Yes . . . blissfully happy, blissfully unconscious, *Max was shuffling his feet again.* Right foot, left foot, they slowly moved out from each other, heel and toe, east and west. Then they came together again as gently and slowly, for Max was content.

For one moment Isabella caught her throat, with an hysterical impulse to scream. Then—the impulse went by. . . .

She hated his doing it. She always would, most

probably. And he would always do it, most probably—that or some other small hateful thing, unless she made his life a continuous burden over it. She had seen them—husbands dragooned like that, stiff, furtive men—well, Max wasn't furtive, anyhow!

Then what her mother had said came back to her.

"After a while it doesn't matter so much."

That was the nearest Isabella could get to defining the thing for herself. But it *didn't* matter so much, somehow. And it wouldn't, ever again. And then, as if she had been fumbling about for a latch and it had suddenly opened under her blind hands, something gave click in her mind, and for a moment she could see the way life was; the eternal compromises, the eternal side-trackings, the eternal uncomprehension, and—the eternal lovingness that buckled everything into its own appointed place.

"And such a *good* place," said Isabella happily to herself. For in that clear-eyed moment she saw how very good life was with all its after alls, if only people loved each other.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

"But I thought Isabella said she'd come for a long visit?" said Angela, returning from a triumphant week in Delaware to find her youngest sister flown.

Mrs. Goldsborough smiled a little.

"Max found he couldn't do without her."

Angela turned to her mother with a puzzled look.

"Mother," she said, "do you suppose there's something wrong with me?"

Mrs. Goldsborough looked up, from her deep old chair, at her only remaining daughter. There was pride in her look.

"Nothing that any of us have ever been able to discover, dear," she said fondly.

And indeed, nothing more satisfactory than Angela Goldsborough had ever been the pride of a family. Even to having stayed with them and been a comfort, when other daughters married with suddenness, or, marrying with deliberation, followed

their husbands to distant parts of the country, Angela had been a blessing. And though she always had more than her fair share of personal gifts, she had been such a dear that from Deborah to Isabella her sisters were delighted instead of envious. She had always been the prettiest, she certainly had the sweetest nature, she sang more than well, she had quite as much charm as tall, golden Deborah, and much more stability of character. And she made nearly as much money with her singing as did Janetta, who still played successfully with real-estate in California, married though she was. She was as good a housekeeper as little demure Annice, the only married daughter who lived in Bentonburg, and she was as gay as Isabella, though she hadn't Isabella's tragic transitions of feeling. And she had a succession of lovers which very much annoyed such of her contemporaries as were not her sisters.

So it was no wonder that Mrs. Goldsborough looked up at her prize daughter in surprise.

"Why do you ask me that?" she inquired. "Did anything happen on your trip that was unpleasant?"

Angela shook her fluffy head, and sat down in the window-seat.

"That's just it. Nothing happened—to me. There was one of the nicest men that ever was, at Mrs. Gordon's where I stayed (you know I'm getting so old now that people are beginning to worry about my not marrying, and hurl men at me). And he didn't need hurling. In one short week so much happened that I'm dizzied yet. He certainly was what Isabella used to call a short-notice lover! As nice as he could be. I liked him. But, oh, Mother, I'm worried about myself. Twenty-seven years old, and I've never been in love!"

Her mother smiled.

"Don't smile!" begged Angela. "Tell me what you think is the reason. Look at the other girls! Janetta was in love three or four times before she married Garrett. Deborah fell in love with Gray at first sight; and she was so much in love with him that I think she feels unworthy of him yet, little goose! Annice is devoted to Arnold in her quiet way, though it isn't in Annice to go crazy over a man. And look at Isabella! Max is the

sun in the heavens. And here am I, fonder of my family than of any man I ever saw."

"Being the oldest," said her mother, who was very reasonable and wise, "has kept your mind from such things. And then there's been your career. You've simply postponed the evil day, I think, my dear, because you've had a life too full of everything else. Don't be discouraged!"

"You're laughing at me," said Angela, smiling herself, "but you give me hope. Mother, I know I've always passed for being practical to the bone. Maybe I am. But the reason I haven't married, and the reason I won't marry to my dying day if it doesn't come off, is that I've got to be in love with the man. In love all over. And I've tried man after man—people have said I flirted. But I was only trying to see if I could like them well enough. And I can't. And I won't till I can."

"It would suit me very well if you never could, as you know," said her mother. "But I think it will happen. Don't despair, my child!"

"Well," said Angela consideringly, "I suppose if it were the other way about, and I was always

in love with men who weren't in love with me, I might be worse off."

"You might," said her mother. "But that's unlikely. . . . Here's a letter from Janetta, dear."

Angela read it over carefully, and looked up at her mother.

"She wants me to come out to the coast and visit her, and she says she'll come back with me if I do—not unless. Garrett has to go on to New York immediately to put on a play, and she's so tied up in a deal she can't go till six weeks after. She says she knows she could arrange a tour for me in the vicinity, and she refuses to be left alone in a big state. It would fit on very well, Mother, if you thought you wouldn't miss me."

"I'd go, then, dear," her mother advised. "Janetta usually means what she says, and it would be nice to see her again."

"Very well," smiled Angela, springing up lightly from her perch. "And maybe I'll find some fascinating Californian who will break my heart. With that in view it will be worth while to go."

But when love did overtake Angela Goldsborough,

it appeared to her about the most trying dispensation that had ever happened to a well-meaning girl.

Janetta gave her the most gorgeous of times. The concerts were a success. Janetta closed the real-estate deal triumphantly, and the sisters came back about six weeks later by the overland route from California. All went well. Angela was a little tired from her concerts, and both girls expected another whirl of good times when they arrived in New York where not only Garrett, but their brother John, was to meet them to see Garrett's play put on. So they drowsed comfortably in their seats, or played a lazy double solitaire, until one evening the conductor came down the aisles and explained to all the passengers that they would have to stop over in the little Ohio town where they were, for two days. He was not very explanatory. It had something to do with washouts and bad tracks, they were vaguely told. So, feeling very wronged, but making more or less of a lark of it because they were together, Janetta and Angela hunted a hotel and established themselves.

Their first night there they were too tired to

do anything but sleep, but next evening they tried to find out if there was any way they could amuse themselves. There wasn't any. All the theaters in town, two in number, and even the movie houses, were closed up. And the reason turned out to be that the Atkinsites were in town.

Angela looked at the hotel-proprietor with her blue eyes wide open.

"What *is* an Atkinsite?" she demanded.

Well, it seemed there was a man named Atkins who had written a sort of new Bible, like the man who made the Book of Mormon. He preached community of goods—they deeded everything to him—and Brotherly Love, and something that was called the Roseate Morn. And their National Convention had landed in the very little Ohio town Angela and Janetta were stalled in, prophet and all. As the sect didn't approve of worldly amusements, everything was shut down in deference to their ideas. The only place left to go to was the Atkinsite Convention.

"Let's go to the Convention," Angela said to Janetta recklessly. "I never did go to a conven-

tion, except once with that beau I had when I was twenty-one, who was going to be a Methodist preacher. It'll be better than sitting reading 'St. Elmo' in the hotel parlor!"

"It certainly will!" said Janetta with feeling. So they went.

There was nothing startling about the Atkinsites. They were mostly kindly-faced country people with seventeen-gored skirts or wrongly-placed whiskers. Pastor Atkins himself was coming onto the platform by the time they got seated, and the whole meeting was going wild with excitement. Angela noticed that a woman in front was panting hard with the sheer nervousness of seeing him, and that a man who was sitting beside her bent down and patted her a little with a brown, capable-looking hand, to quiet her.

Pastor Atkins was a little, authoritative old man with piercing black eyes and a frill of white whiskers under his chin.

"Roseate Morn, do they call it?" whispered Janetta irreverently to her sister. "It's more what I'd call a Dark Good-night."

"Sh-h!" said Angela. "This is thrilling. Listen!"

So they listened.

The world was coming to an end, he said, and everybody but the Atkinsites would be promptly burnt up the week of October 11-18 coming. That was just the week Angela expected to spend at a particularly interesting house-party, and it struck her as very inconsiderate of the Atkinsites. She said so to Janetta, and they were giggling like a couple of children when the man in front of them turned and eyed them hard.

And as his eyes fell on Angela something seemed to go click, breathlessly, in her somewhere, and suddenly she felt an intense thrill all over her. She had fallen in love for the first and only time in her life—and he was an Atkinsite.

He might have been twenty-eight or thirty-five—you can't tell with that type of man. And he was a proof of what Angela had always said,—just a little more and Lincoln would have been fascinatingly handsome. This man was the little more. He had that same eagle-like look, and proud carriage of the

head, thick crested hair, and the most wonderful eyes she had ever seen in a man's head. Glorious, large, dark-gray eyes they were, with heavy, curved, black lashes all around them. He looked strong and kind and wise and wonderful; and here he was, in a frock coat that was too tight across the shoulders, and one of those awful loose Western statesman collars with a piece cut out of the front to show your Adam's-apple, and a made-up satin four-in-hand askew. At one side of him sat the good old lady he'd patted, and on the other two dreadful girls in mussy waists that fitted in all the wrong places, and faces that shone with brown soap and perspiration and worked wads of gum.

Well, there sat Angela's man in front of her with his broad shoulders pulled together by his frock coat, and his hair waving over that splendidly-shaped head in the most fascinating way—an Atkinsite. And she was in love with him. And it felt *heavenly*—and then when she'd remembered that he was an Atkinsite, and most likely an exhorter to boot, it felt *awful*. The worst of it was, it wasn't just fascination she felt for him. It was

love, real, genuine, lasting love. Her eyes filled with tears.

If she could only have thought it was a passing fancy! But Angela had had *them* for five or ten minutes in the past, and though she'd sometimes thought they were love, she'd always known they weren't.

"What is it, Angel?" whispered Janetta. "Is the room too hot? Shall we go?"

Angela shook her head.

"It's that man in front!" she whispered. "He's so kind and strong-looking, and so impossible—it—it hurts my feelings!"

Janetta smiled her wise smile.

"Oh, no," she said. "Not impossible—don't go so far as that. For his class, he's a charmer. Say—improbable."

Improbable—yes, that was the word. So was the whole affair, entirely improbable. Well, Angela thought she might as well be happy while it lasted. She was near him, that was one blessed comfort. Just as Pastor Atkins was working up to a colossal hat-passing, one of the usher-girls scurried up the

aisle with a note for him. He may have made all his followers deed their farms to him, but Pastor Atkins certainly was as brave a person as you'd wish to see.

"I have received word that floods are expected shortly," he announced, as calm as you please. Well, Angela remembered, a mere flood *wasn't* much to a man who expected to burn the world up in two months. "The brothers and sisters will please rise and file out, returning each to his own place for what he holds most valuable, thence to the higher ground. I myself will lead you."

And lead them he did, in the most beautiful, orderly way you ever saw, out of that big building.

The brother with the gray eyes put on a felt sombrero and helped his old lady out, for she was on the verge of hysterics. The girls didn't belong to him, Angela found with relief. But it felt like taking the most valuable thing she had ever had away from her, when she lost sight of him in the sheets of rain outside the door.

There wasn't any time to lose. The girls hurried to the hotel to pack their suit-cases, for it was on

the low ground. Fortunately their trunks had gone ahead, so they hadn't to worry over them. It was like the most horrible nightmare they ever experienced, being out in the middle of that crowd of terrified, hurrying people, drenched by those relentless sheets of rain, running away from that dreadful racing water that *would* catch up to them, weighed down by those heavy suit-cases and the feeling that they *couldn't* escape. And that dreadful feeling in Angela's heart, besides, about Brother Gray-Eyes!

They were nearly knee-high presently, and Janetta said: "We can't go any further, Angel! We'll be washed away. We'll have to turn into the first house that's high enough. . . . Here!"

It was, it turned out, a three-story apartment house, very new and solid. They ran in and up those two flights of stairs like exhausted wild animals, the water vengefully after them. It was gas-lighted, but deserted. They never stopped till they were in the middle of the top-floor apartment, whose doors stood wide open.

Angela's intelligence did not desert her. She had scarcely stopped to get her breath before she turned

on the water in the bathtub, and in the stationary tubs, too, as soon as she found them. It was a blessing she did, for that was all the water they had for two days.

Just as she had triumphantly filled the last tub, she heard a scream from Janetta. She had taken off her wet shoes as soon as she came in, and then sprung up at a noise outside. And she had slipped on the wet floor and turned her ankle.

"Of all things to happen to you in the midst of a flood!" said Janetta ruefully, eying her ankle. "That's what comes of pride. I turned that ankle just before Garrett went, and he wanted me to get an ankle-support, and I said I was too young and beautiful. And this is what comes of it."

Angela got her up on the couch of the living-room and went to hunt for arnica. She must have lost her head about then, for she never thought about the bathroom medicine cabinet, but went mousing through the bedrooms. It was a good-sized flat, with four bedrooms all made up spic-and-span, except for the bureau-drawers scattered all over the floors. And in the last bedroom, as if

they'd been saving him for a surprise, was a man, a great big man, hunting frantically around in that bumble-bee-in-a-hat fashion men do hunt. He straightened and turned when he heard her step. Brother Gray-Eyes!

Her heart gave one enormous bounce, then almost turned over. But she managed to pull herself together.

"I beg your pardon, Brother," she said meekly, "if this is your apartment. My sister and I ran up here to get out of the flood, and—and I'm afraid we can't get away, specially as my sister's hurt her foot."

Brother Gray-Eyes smiled—such a nice protecting smile! and stopped pawing about the room.

"I don't belong here, either, Sister," he began. Then he stopped short and his face changed. "You sat behind me to-day," he said abruptly.

She was afraid he was going to lecture her for frivolity, but evidently he thought better of it, for he went on about himself.

"I got my suit-case mixed with the one that

belonged to the man in this flat," he explained. "There are some important papers in it, and I had to have it, so I came after it. But the people here are gone, and I can't find it. And I guess I'm as badly storm-stayed as yourselves."

He smiled again, that nice, flashing smile. Oh, why did he have to be a Brother, with a belief in giving away all your money, and Roseate Morns? And he'd called her Sister. Well, it was no wonder, bedraggled as she was.

"I—I'll go tell Janetta you're here," she stammered and ran.

Janetta was certainly possessed of monumental calm. Rain and floods and hurt ankle and all, there she was getting a little nap on the couch. Angela waked her ruthlessly.

"Janetta!" she panted, "that man who sat in front of us to-day, that Brother with the big gray eyes and the old lady—he's here in the flat, caught the same way we were; and—and he thinks I'm an Atkinsite Sister—he called me so. And—Janetta, do you mind letting him think so? It may make things pleasanter." For she had made up

her mind like a flash, the minute he said "Sister," that she would pretend she *was* one.

"Why, very well, Angel," said Janetta, looking amused. "Only let me out, please. I understand it doesn't have to run in families. Tell him not to discuss it with me—it may excite my weak ankle."

Janetta began to laugh and laugh in the most heartless way. She could be most exasperating at times.

Then Angela called in Brother Gray-Eyes and introduced him to Janetta. His name was Dan Asherley, he said.

"My sister is Mrs. King," Angela said. "You —you may call me Sister Angela. My sister isn't a Sister." Janetta giggled a little at that; her sense of humor was really too rampageous for a married woman, Angela thought severely. But she straightened her face out quickly and became very decorous and amiable.

They got the arnica and made her comfortable, then they started on a regular tour of inspection over the flat, as if it were a real honeymoon. And

—fire or flood or Atkinsites—Angela was happier than she had ever been in her life before.

They found that there were enough stores to last a week, flour, butter, bacon, baking-powder and everything, and chops, gelatine-pudding and a roast in the ice-box. Even an apron behind the door and a fire in the range.

Of course everything was turned off and they sat in the dark that night. But Angela couldn't make it seem like anything worse than a heavenly honeymoon. He was so everything she liked—what was a frock coat and a Roseate Morn more or less? And talking to him and Janetta, and helping him hunt the suit-case, and attending to the biscuits by the light of a candle, she had actually forgotten there was any horrible, steadily-rising flood.

She remembered it fast enough when he said: "You and your sister had better not undress, Sister. Just lie down on the tops of your beds. I think I'd better sit up."

She shivered. She had forgotten that horrid, brutal black water. Daniel watched it all night, but the girls didn't sleep much either.

They made him sleep all the next morning. It was worse then. The water was halfway up the second flight of stairs. Another half-flight and it would begin to trickle over their floors. And things, big dreadful things, kept floating by outside and bumping the house. And once they saw a dead man go by. It was horrible. But they let Brother Asherley sleep till he woke of his own accord, and managed to have a hot meal for him when he did wake.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

The flood never did really reach them, it turned out. Their house stood, though twice they thought it wouldn't. Still, they had a better chance there than outdoors, Dan assured them, and they sat on a couch, Dan with an arm around each of the girls. He never said a word about Atkinsism even then, but they all prayed a little. Then nothing happened and they all took long breaths and went to work arranging the furniture that had slid into one corner of the room. Angela cried a little, and Dan comforted her.

Dan could do a most amazing amount of things, for an Atkinsite. He played the piano, even, one night in the dark, and they sang college songs. When Angela asked him where he learned, he said something about coaching the glee-club, then caught himself up embarrassedly. She said no more. Evidently the sect didn't smile on parlor tricks. And, quite as evidently, he'd been a college man before the Atkinsites got him.

Paddling all over the house-tops in a canoe, helping the relief people, didn't leave him much time for music after that. Angela saw so little of him after the flood began to go down that she was quite cross. But he seemed as glad to get back as she was to have him come. She had that consolation.

"Thank goodness, we don't have to wear the relief garments!" said Janetta, looking over a bundle of things that Dan had received for distribution, and was passing out again. "I wonder what demon sent this thing, Angel?"

She held up a maroon skirt trimmed askew with blue braid, destined to sag irreparably till its last day.

"M'm," said Angela dreamily.

"Angel, do wake up! You act to me as if something terrible had happened to you. This is uncomfortable, but after all it can't last forever, and we have enough to eat, and your luck about having a man to wait on you hasn't failed you. I wish I could hear from Garrett. He must be frantic."

"M'm," said Angela again.

Janetta rose on one elbow, and her black eyes rested on her sister with a keen interest.

"Angel, you have always sworn, from the days of your childhood, that you would never part your hair in the middle. Of course you're pretty that way, but it *does* look so much better natural. Is it part of this awful Sister masquerade? I think your Atkinsite friend would have been quite as malleable if you'd remained one of the world, and it's very hard on me, not being able to giggle when I want to, when he calls you Sister Angela."

"Giggle just whenever you like, Janetta," said small Angela, rising up and asserting the elder sisterhood that had nearly slipped from her in the rush of her feelings. "Poor child, you have little enough to think of! And now, is there anything I can get for you, dear?"

The power of habit is strong, and Janetta took the place Angela assigned her.

The flood stopped rising the second day, but it didn't sink very fast. They couldn't get out of the town, anyhow, because every means of communication from the outside world had been wrecked, of

course, by the water. Nothing could be heard of the people who had lived in their camping-ground—their name, it seemed, was Pugh—and they were as comfortable there as they would have been anywhere. And anyway, Janetta's ankle wasn't quite all right yet. So the three stayed there and were happy.

You get to know people more in a time like that than in months of usual knowing. Angela felt by the fourth day of their isolation in the middle of the flood that she'd known Dan all her life and back of that; and when she let herself think of parting from him she wanted to walk out of the window and drown herself in the convenient flood. It had come hard, coming so late.

She had often wondered about the little, everyday things of married life; seeing after the man's mending, and having to realize that he got holes in his socks, and other dreadfully unheroic things like that—and whether they weren't a fearful jar at first. Well, she found out—they weren't. She got to the point, quite naturally, where she saw that he changed his things when he came in wet. Mr.

Pugh's shirts fitted him fairly well, fortunately, and they had outing collars, so her eyes were spared that painful Atkinsite collar after the first day.

Everything comes to an end, though; even an Ohio flood. The time came—how she wished it wouldn't!—when things had straightened themselves tediously out, and the roads and pavements began to show through the mud, and the water and the gas, electricity and town-clocks were set going; and the railroads would be all right in a day or so, and Janetta's ankle bore her weight.

The afternoon of the eighth day Angela heard Dan, who had been looking sadder and sadder as clearing-up time approached, dash upstairs two at a time, whistling as cheerfully as if he *liked* parting with her. It made her feel horrible. She got out of the way and shut herself in her bedroom.

"I suppose he's heard from some horrid, *real* Sister he's engaged to," she said to herself, piling up the agony, "and she's safe." He had never said a word about anyone but his mother, who lived in Virginia; the old lady he'd patted had been just a passing acquaintance.

Then and there, sitting in a heap on the edge of her bed, she made up her mind that she didn't care *what* Dan believed, or whether he mailed a pay-envelope to Pastor Atkins every Saturday night—she loved him enough to marry him, wrong clothes, wild ideas and all.

She went out into the living-room, where Janetta was amusing herself with a nap, and sat down to wait for Dan to come in and tell her the worst—if that Sister really existed. It was the longest ten minutes of her life.

When he did come in he burst in as if somebody'd made him a present of the whole Roseate Morn at once.

"Angela! Oh, Angela!" he called, "I've found my suit-case. Pugh poked it up in the attic, and I never even saw there was a trap-door there till he told me! I've got the Wheatly Bridge Company's construction papers that I've been worrying over, and my letter-of-credit and everything! And thank goodness, I've got my own clothes. I was so sick of wearing old Brother Somebody's strait-jacket."

Angela had been sitting with her blue eyes

dropped, but she did lift them then, and look at him. "Good *gracious!*" she said faintly at what she saw before her.

Brother Asherley had on as well-cut a gray suit as you ever saw. He'd shaved, naturally, which had been an impossibility during the flood, because he hadn't had any razors, and from his collar to his boots everything was different, and *right*. She stared wildly.

"They weren't yours?" she panted.

"Of *course* they weren't, goosie," he said indignantly. "They were too small everywhere they weren't too big—I should think you could have seen!"

"Then—then—you *aren't a Brother?*"

He looked as aghast as if she had accused him of stealing. Then that pioneer jaw of his set, and his great gray-black eyes darkened.

"No," he said. "I'm not. I tried to get away with it, but I guess I can't, Sister Angela. I—well, I might as well make a clean breast of it. I did it because I thought I'd have a better chance with you if you thought I believed what you did. I don't

believe in the Roseate Morn, or community of goods or anything like that. But, oh, Angela—*you* can! If you'll only marry me anyway, you can be an Atkinsite or a Mormon or a Mohammedan for all I care! I'll never interfere with your religion, dear, truly I won't,—Angela!"

Angela must have looked willing. For he made one swoop and caught her tight.

For a minute she never said a word; she was too happy. Then suddenly the whole thing struck her like a big wave. He'd thought she was one and she'd thought he was one, and they'd both been pretending for the same reason, all that awful, heavenly flood-time! She began to laugh and laugh and *laugh.* "But—but I'm *not!*" she gurgled. "I'm no more one than you! And—and I was pretending, too!"

She pulled the pins out of that meek Madonna bun of hers that Janetta had so objected to, right there, and shook her hair down and whisked it up on top, the way she usually wore it.

"What for?" he said sternly.

Then the "for" seemed to dawn on him. "You

blessed little fraud!" he said, and pulled her close again. And they kept on laughing, even while he kissed her till they waked Janetta.

For a moment Janetta never said a word. Her eyes went over first Dan, with his real clothes and human collar and all, then Angela, with her hair half in her eyes and Dan's arms around her. Then she spoke.

"Impossible!" said Janetta clearly. "Im-*possible!*"

Angela laughed again and never moved.

"Oh, no, dear," she said, as Janetta herself had said when they saw him first, "not impossible—improbable!"

But Janetta had the last word.

"I *thought* it was improbable!"

"What?" said Angela.

"His being an Atkinsite!" said she.

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